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U.S. STRATEGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
THE SPRATLY ISLANDS DISPUTE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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93-28145

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

OMB NO. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE 4 June 1993	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis, 1 Aug 92 - 4 Jun 93	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE U.S. Strategy in Southeast Asia: The Spratly Islands Dispute			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) LCDR Mara C. Hurwitt, USN				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U. S. Army Command and General Staff College Attn: ATZL-SWD-CD Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027-6900			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This study examines U.S. policy towards the Spratly Islands dispute as it relates to the overall U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War era. The ongoing dispute among China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei over this group of virtually uninhabited islands in the South China Sea concerns U.S. regional and strategic interests. The study includes a review of the geography and history of the Spratlys and of the legal issues involved in the competing claims. It examines the interests of the U.S., the six claimant nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the dispute and considers the potential for future military conflict in the Spratlys, such as that which occurred between China and Vietnam in 1988. The U.S. Army CGSC Strategic Analysis Methodology (SAM) provides the framework for an analysis of the dispute and the development of alternative U.S. policy options employing the diplomatic, economic, military, and informational elements of national power. Each option is evaluated on the basis of its feasibility, acceptability, and suitability in supporting U.S. interests.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Southeast Asia, South China Sea, Spratly Islands			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 119	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

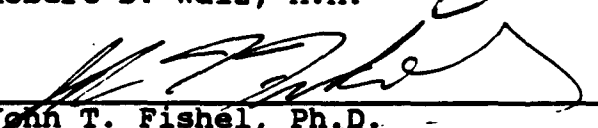
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

**U.S. STRATEGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE SPRATLY ISLANDS
DISPUTE by LCDR Mara C. Hurwitt, USN, 119 pages.**

This study examines U.S. policy towards the Spratly Islands dispute as it relates to the overall U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War era. The ongoing dispute among China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei over this group of virtually uninhabited islands in the South China Sea concerns U.S. regional and strategic interests.

The study includes a review of the geography and history of the Spratly archipelago and of the legal issues involved in the competing claims. It examines the interests of the U.S., the six claimant nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the dispute and considers the potential for future military conflict in the Spratlys, such as that which occurred between China and Vietnam in 1988.

The U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Strategic Analysis Methodology (SAM) provides the framework for an analysis of the dispute and the development of alternative U.S. policy options employing the diplomatic, economic, military, and informational elements of national power. Each option is evaluated on the basis of its feasibility, acceptability, and suitability in supporting U.S. interests.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Spratly Islands: A Regional Problem with Strategic Implications

In the post-Cold War era, the United States must formulate new strategies to support its national interests which reflect changes in the global security environment. This paper examines U.S. policy towards the Spratly Islands dispute as it relates to the overall U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia. The ongoing dispute over this group of virtually uninhabited islands in the South China Sea merits attention because of its impact on U.S. strategic and regional interests. The Spratly archipelago straddles major sea lines of communication (SLOCs) which are critical to free trade and navigation throughout the Pacific. U.S. economic interests and military security require unencumbered access to the South China Sea and onward to the Straits of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, and Southwest Asia. In addition, regional stability, which is threatened by the Spratlys dispute, supports U.S. interests in Southeast Asia by promoting economic and political development.

Six nations--China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei--presently claim the Spratly Islands

in whole or in part. All except Brunei maintain some form of presence there. Vietnam reportedly has stationed troops on 21 islands, the Philippines on eight, China on six, Malaysia on three, and Taiwan on one.¹ Their competing claims are founded on a variety of historical, territorial, and legal issues and principles. The United Nation's Convention on the Law of the Sea has introduced additional issues concerning archipelagic states, territorial seas, baselines, and the continental shelf to an already complex multilateral dispute. In addition to the inherent strategic value of the Spratly Islands due to their location astride critical Pacific SLOCs, the promise of potentially rich offshore oil and natural gas reserves in the archipelago has increased their economic importance to the competing claimants.

The conflict in claims between China and Vietnam is potentially the most volatile. China and Vietnam most recently engaged in a short, but violent, naval battle in the Spratlys in March 1988, when Chinese forces reportedly sank three Vietnamese supply ships, killed 72 Vietnamese sailors, and took nine prisoner.² Although China clearly demonstrated its growing naval power, the brief conflict was not decisive. Each side subsequently occupied additional islets in the chain, and the clash prompted other claimants to fortify their positions as well.³

The break up of the Soviet Union has significantly altered the power equation in the South China Sea. Vietnam has lost its primary source of economic and military assistance and its chief ally against China. Meanwhile, China and Russia have embarked on a new era of rapprochement, highlighted by the December 1992 Sino-Russian summit in Beijing. Along with a reduced threat along its northern border with Mongolia, China now enjoys economic, technical, and military exchanges and increased trade with its former Russian adversary.⁴ Additionally, the demise of Cam Ranh Bay as a forward base of the Soviet Pacific Fleet and the withdrawal of the U.S. Seventh Fleet and 13th Air Force from the Philippines have strengthened China's relative position in the region, particularly in regard to the Spratlys dispute.

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to expand its power projection capabilities with the modernization of its air and naval forces. The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has purchased SU-27 fighter aircraft from Russia and is developing an air-to-air refueling capability for its fighters and bombers, which will give them the range to provide cover over the entire South China Sea. Beijing is also reportedly pursuing the acquisition of an aircraft carrier as part of its ongoing program of naval modernization and upgrades.⁵

The PLA is emphasizing development of rapid reaction forces at the national and military region level.⁶ In addition, since the 1988 Sino-Vietnamese conflict, PLA Marines have practiced amphibious landings and heliborne raids against simulated enemy-held islands.⁷ With the loss of its Soviet benefactor and outmatched militarily, Vietnam's ability to respond to any Chinese threat is severely limited. Hanoi has little chance of defending its position in the Spratlys should Beijing move to seize the Vietnamese occupied islands.

Despite some recent diplomatic overtures, to date there has been little real progress towards achieving a lasting solution to the Spratlys conflict. Indonesia, a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) whose members also include Spratlys claimants Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei, has hosted three unofficial conferences on potential conflicts in the South China Sea since 1990.⁸ Participants in the most recent four-day workshop held 30 June to 2 July 1992 issued a non-binding statement recommending that territorial disputes in the region be dealt with through negotiation instead of force and that efforts focus on joint development of resources rather than the resolution of issues of sovereignty.⁹ These recommendations were later formalized in a declaration by the ASEAN foreign ministers at their July 1992 annual meeting in Manila.¹⁰

The ASEAN plan proposed postponing any discussion of conflicting territorial claims in the Spratlys for an indefinite period, while negotiations are conducted on the multilateral exploitation of the archipelago's natural resources. Vietnam and China, two of the three non-ASEAN claimants to the Spratlys, sent representatives to the meeting, although they were not signatories to the formal declaration. Hanoi, which has favored formal talks on the Spratly Islands issue, lent its support to the ASEAN plan for joint development.¹¹ Beijing's position, however, has remained ambiguous. China reportedly agreed to delay implementation of its February 1992 legislation which formally incorporated several disputed islands including the entire Spratly group into its national territory and declared its right to use military force against encroachment by any foreign nation.¹²

China resolutely maintains its absolute sovereignty over the Spratly Islands and, while voicing support for portions of the ASEAN declaration, opposes the notion that sovereignty and jurisdiction over the islands can be the subject of some future negotiations. Beijing has itself advocated joint economic development of the disputed areas, although the Chinese have generally preferred bilateral negotiations to the use of a multinational forum favored by other claimants.¹³

Nonetheless, Beijing is unilaterally pursuing its May 1992 contract with the Denver-based Crestone Energy Corporation for oil exploration in an area of the Spratlys claimed by Vietnam. China has promised Crestone the full protection of the PLA Navy (PLAN), calling into question its sincerity regarding peaceful resolution of conflicts and joint development of resources.¹⁴ In sum, China would appear to see the benefits of diplomacy in the Spratlys dispute, but has stopped short of any commitment which might limit its future actions.

While the Indonesian conferences and the ASEAN resolution have laid the foundations for future negotiations, no substantive talks have yet taken place. Furthermore, the most contentious issues--sovereignty and jurisdiction over the islands--have only been set aside for the time being. If the area does indeed prove rich in natural resources, the problem of how to properly distribute the proceeds of any joint project will likely push the sovereignty question back into the forefront.

With the balance of power and stability of the region at stake, the United States has not yet articulated a clear policy towards the Spratlys dispute. Although a U.S. embassy official was reportedly in attendance at the signing of Crestone's oil exploration contract with Beijing, the U.S. government has denied any official backing of the agreement.¹⁵ At the ASEAN foreign ministers conference in

July 1992, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker stated that the United States "has not taken any positions yet" regarding the Spratlys dispute.¹⁶

Washington appears to be taking a hands-off approach and leaving ASEAN and the various claimants to settle the dispute among themselves. The question remains whether this policy supports U.S. interests in the region. Is "no position," i.e., an official hands-off policy, consistent with the overall U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia? This paper attempts to answer that question by examining the current U.S. policy towards the dispute in the context of the broader issues involved, including not only the interests of the United States but also of the six claimant nations and ASEAN.

Research Design

Research for this paper has been divided into the following general areas:

1. Examination of the competing claims to the Spratly Islands. The research includes a review of the available primary source documents, i.e., policy statements by the governments of the nations involved as well as several studies concerning the historical, territorial, and legal aspects of the dispute. The intent is to provide an overview of the geography of the area, the basis of competing claims to the islands, and the comparative legality of these claims.

2. Examination of the interests and objectives of the competing claimants to the Spratly Islands. The research focuses on the strategic, territorial, and economic interests involved, including the potential offshore oil and natural gas reserves in the region.

3. Examination of the potential for future military conflict in the Spratly Islands. The research includes a review of previous military incidents in the South China Sea, (particularly the March 1988 Sino-Vietnamese Spratly Islands conflict), military capabilities of the claimants with special emphasis on Chinese and Vietnamese power projection capabilities, and the changing regional balance of power.

4. Examination of attempts at peaceful negotiation of the dispute among the claimants, including recent ASEAN initiatives.

5. Review of current U.S. policies in Southeast Asia, particularly those dealing with China and Vietnam; examination of U.S. policy statements or initiatives which suggest a U.S. position on the Spratly Islands dispute.

6. Examination of U.S. strategic interests and objectives in the Asia-Pacific region in the post-Cold War security environment focusing on U.S interests in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea. The research includes a review of both official U.S. strategy and policy statements

and a number of professional articles and papers on U.S. regional interests.

7. Examination of the relationship between U.S. policies in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea and U.S. strategic interests and objectives in the Asia-Pacific region.

Analytical Model

The analytical model employed in this paper is the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Strategic Analysis Methodology (SAM). The SAM begins with the identification of the problem and essential assumptions, followed by the identification of U.S. interests and elements of national power and the identification of other relevant actors, their interests, elements of power, strengths, weaknesses, and likely courses of action in order to determine feasible scenarios and develop and test options. This methodology provides an excellent framework for an analysis of the Spratly Islands dispute because it is designed to consider the interrelationship of the interests, objectives, and possible actions of multiple actors, in this case the six Spratlys claimants and ASEAN, in addition to the United States. From this analysis, the SAM develops alternative policy options which draw on one or more of the elements of national power--military, economic, diplomatic, and informational--and evaluate them based on feasibility (are the necessary resources available), acceptability

(support of the national will), and suitability (will it attain the desired outcome). Each option is also evaluated in terms of associated costs, benefits, and risks. For the purposes of this paper, Policy Option 1 is the current "hands-off" policy towards the dispute, as stated by James Baker. Alternate policies are developed through the application of the Strategic Analysis Methodology. (See Appendix B for a more detailed explanation of the Strategic Analysis Methodology.)

Endnotes

¹Editorial, "Spratly Claimants Have to Exercise Full Restraint," The Nation (Bangkok), 4 July 1992: A6, as cited in FBIS-EAS-92-190, 7 July 1992: 59-60.

²Michael Richardson, "Spratlys Increasing Cause for Concern," Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter 19 (October-November 1992): 35.

³Richardson, 35.

⁴"Official Reviews Aim, Agenda of PRC Minister's Visit," Moscow Itar-Tass, 0658 GMT (24 November 1992), as cited in FBIS-SOV-92-228, 25 November 1992: 8-9.

⁵Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Builds Its Military Muscle, Making Some Neighbors Nervous," New York Times, 11 January 1993: A1, A8.

⁶Clare Hollingworth, "PLA Faces Big Cuts," Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter 19 (August-September 1992): 25-26.

⁷"A Visit to the PLA Marine Corps," Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition) (Beijing), 2 August 1988: 2, as translated in FBIS-CHI-88-149, 3 August 1988: 30.

⁸"Delegates Agree on Development Cooperation," Jakarta Antara, 1110 GMT (30 June 1992), as cited in FBIS-EAS-92-127, 1 July 1992: 1.

⁹"Spratly Claimants," The Nation (Bangkok), A6.

¹⁰Philip Shenon, "Asian Nations Hope to Settle Dispute Over Islands Peacefully," New York Times International, 23 July 1992: A9.

¹¹Editorial, "Spratlys Problem," Straits Times (Singapore), 27 July 1992: 24, as cited in FBIS-EAS-92-146, 29 July 1992: 21-22.

¹²"Spratlys Claimants Urged to Act With Restraint," Jakarta Antara, 1006 GMT (29 July 1992), as cited in FBIS-EAS-92-147, 30 July 1992: 30.

¹³"PRC Suggests Consultative Mechanism," The Nation (Bangkok), 22 July 1992: A1-A2, as cited in FBIS-EAS-92-142, 23 July 1992: 1.

¹⁴Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Signs Oil Deal for Disputed Waters," New York Times International, 18 June 1992: A8.

¹⁵Kristof, "China Signs Oil Deal," A8.

¹⁶Robert S. Greenberger, "Spratly Islands Dispute in Southeast Asia Spotlights U.S. Role In Regional Security," Wall Street Journal, 24 July 1992: A6.

CHAPTER TWO
A SPRATLY ISLANDS PRIMER

Geography of the Spratly Islands

The Spratly Islands are a group of islands, reefs, banks, cays, and shoals located in the area 4°N to 11°30'N latitude and 109°30'E to 117°50'E longitude in the South China Sea. They are one of the four archipelagos of the South China Sea, along with the Paracels, the Pratas, and Macclesfield Bank. The Spratly group contains over 100 formations of island character (i.e., islands, reefs, and cays) scattered over a large oval-shaped region that spans 1000 kilometers at its widest point.¹ R. Haller-Trost has described the position of the Spratlys relative to the littoral countries of the South China Sea:

To the north and northeast lies a 3000 mtr deep trench, separating the archipelago from the Vietnamese and Chinese continental shelf. The Palawan Trough in the east separates the Philippine continental shelf from the Spratlys. With regard to distance, the islands are located closer to the Philippines and Malaysia than to Vietnam, the People's Republic of China (PRC) or the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROC).²

According to Haller-Trost, the archipelago takes its name from a nineteenth century British sea captain, either Richard Spratly or William Spratly, although he was unable to determine which of the two.³ Because much of this area

of the South China Sea was not accurately surveyed until 1960, the Spratlys were referred to as "Dangerous Ground" on navigation charts and maps and generally avoided by commercial shipping.⁴

The Spratly archipelago is believed to be of primarily volcanic origin; however, some of the formations appear to be the result of river sedimentary deposits, making them a promising area for oil exploration.⁵ Fewer than 30 of the islands remain above sea level at high tide, and most of these are considered too small to be habitable without external support. The largest, Itu Aba, is only about .4 square kilometers in size, and Spratly Island itself covers approximately .15 square kilometers. The land areas permanently above sea level are covered with vegetation (grass, bushes, coconut palms, and occasionally mangrove swamps), and fresh water is available on the primary islands.⁶

History of the Spratly Islands

Both Vietnam and China (Taiwan and the PRC) lay claim to the Spratly Islands on the basis of historical evidence. Therefore, any examination of competing claims to the islands requires a review of their historical status, including discovery, occupation, use, and treaties. The history of the Spratlys, especially prior to World War II, is somewhat ambiguous and has itself been the subject of much disagreement. Only the salient points of this history

are discussed here, in an effort to shed light on some of the origins of the ongoing dispute over sovereignty. For a more detailed treatment of this subject, as well as related disputes over other South China Sea archipelagos, the reader is directed to several studies cited here.⁷

The Chinese claim that the Spratly or Nansha Islands (along with the other archipelagos of the South China Sea) have been a part of China since "ancient times."⁸ However, while there is adequate evidence of extensive Chinese maritime activity in the South China Sea between the tenth and fifteenth centuries and of Chinese familiarity with other islands in the region, there are no references to the Spratlys during this period. Marwyn S. Samuels concludes from a study of ancient and medieval trade and navigation that the Spratlys remained beyond the main shipping corridor of the time.⁹ Although Chinese scavengers and fishermen may have visited the islands earlier, 1867 marks the first reference to a Chinese presence, when a British survey crew encountered fishermen from Hainan on Itu Aba.¹⁰

In 1883 the Chinese government reportedly protested survey work being conducted in the Spratlys by a German military detachment, resulting in their withdrawal.¹¹ This is the earliest indication of any official Chinese interest in the islands; however, it does not "[represent] an unequivocal statement of sovereignty."¹² The first documentation of possible Chinese sovereignty over the

Spratlys can be found in the 1887 convention on the border between China and Tonkin. In this border agreement which followed the Sino-French War of 1884-85, France ceded all islands east of 105°43'E longitude to China.¹³ However, according to Samuels, the convention is ambiguous, failing to delineate northern or southern boundaries, and is subject to various interpretations concerning its application to the South China Sea region.¹⁴

The Chinese took no action to assert their sovereignty over the Spratly archipelago following the Sino-French agreement. In 1917 a Japanese company began to fish in Spratly waters and to exploit the islands' extensive guano deposits for their phosphate, eliciting no response from the Chinese government.¹⁵ France occupied and annexed several of the Spratly Islands in 1933 (between six and nine, according to different sources), although the French declaration of annexation apparently recognized the existence of a population of Hainan Chinese fishermen living on the islands.¹⁶ France maintained it was acting in the interest of international navigational safety and would construct lighthouses and navigation aids but no military fortifications.¹⁷ According to later statements by the Republic of Vietnam, the French, as colonial rulers of Cochinchina, based their claim on the Vietnamese Emperor Gia-long's formal governance of the islands in 1816. Although Japan formally protested the French annexation, it

remains a point of contention whether China also issued a demarche to Paris.¹⁸

In 1939, following their conquest of Hainan, the Japanese occupied the entire Spratly group, placing them under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Japanese territory of Taiwan. The Japanese constructed military support facilities on the larger islands and established a submarine base at Itu Aba. Although France issued a protest against the Japanese action, there is no evidence that the French had effectively governed the Spratlys prior to Japanese occupation.¹⁹ Here again it is unclear which nation had the better claim to sovereignty. The Japanese had exercised uninterrupted economic control over the Spratly region since 1917.²⁰ Therefore, while France had annexed and administered a portion of the archipelago prior to World War II, Japan's claim was "at least equally well-founded."²¹

The Spratly Islands After World War II

Neither Samuels nor Haller-Trost finds any evidence of the formal occupation of the Spratly Islands between August 1945 and July 1946 by any nation, following the Japanese surrender and withdrawal of forces.²² Both China and France sent naval task forces to the archipelago in late 1946. In October the French placed a stone marker on Itu Aba to renew their claim, although they did not declare formal sovereignty over the Spratlys. In response, two ships of a Nationalist Chinese flotilla were dispatched to

retake the island a few months later.²³ Neither France nor Vietnam issued a protest when the Nationalist government installed a Chinese naval administrator for the Spratlys on Itu Aba in December 1947.²⁴ As a result of the Chinese civil war, the Nationalists apparently withdrew all forces by May 1950, leaving the Chinese base on Itu Aba deserted until July 1956.²⁵

The two documents which greatly affected the post-World War II status of the Spratly Islands were the September 1951 Treaty of San Francisco and the April 1952 Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty. In the 1951 treaty Japan renounced all claims to the Spratly and Paracel Islands (which Japanese forces had also occupied during the war); however, the treaty did not specify to whom the islands devolved, creating a great deal of ambiguity regarding ownership.²⁶ Vietnam immediately declared its sovereignty over the Spratlys. Although none of the 51 signatories present objected, the Beijing and Taipei governments--clearly the most interested parties--were not represented at the conference.²⁷

The 1952 Peace Treaty between Japan and Nationalist China reiterated Japan's renunciation of all claims to the Spratly Islands (along with Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Paracels), although the devolution of the islands still remained ambiguous. As Samuels observes, however, this was a bilateral treaty, and it is therefore reasonable to infer

that Japan renounced its rights to all the territories discussed in favor of the Taipei government. Japan had previously stipulated that the treaty would deal with only those territories which concerned Nationalist China, lending further support to this interpretation.²⁸

There was little further interest shown in the Spratly Islands until May 1956, when Filipino businessman Tomas Cloma claimed possession of the islands by right of "discovery and occupation" dating to 1947.²⁹ Cloma proclaimed the state of Kalayaan (Freedomland), comprising most of the Spratly archipelago and all of its principal islands. The Philippine government assumed an extraordinarily vague position on the question of sovereignty. Without officially recognizing Cloma's claim, Manila issued a formal note which suggested that the claim was valid so long as no other nation had established exclusive sovereignty over the islands under international law. Manila further muddled the waters by distinguishing the "seven-island group known internationally as the Spratlys" from the remaining islands of the archipelago (including those of the Kalayaan group) which were considered *res nullius* (belonging to no one) and open to exploitation and settlement.³⁰

In addition to bringing the Philippines into the Spratly Islands contest, Cloma's proclamation renewed the interests of the other claimants to the archipelago. Within

two months Beijing, Taipei, Saigon, and Paris had all protested to Manila. Between June and September 1956, Taipei deployed three naval task forces to patrol the islands and reassert Taiwan's authority.³¹ South Vietnam also dispatched a destroyer to the Spratlys, although it apparently remained in the southwestern corner of the archipelago, a comfortable distance from the Taiwanese ships.³² In July a Taiwanese crew reoccupied their abandoned base and raised the Nationalist flag on Itu Aba, where reportedly Taiwanese forces have since maintained a continuous presence (although sources differ on this point).³³ There are no reports of any PLAN activity in the Spratlys during this period.³⁴

In September 1958 Beijing issued its official "Declaration on the Territorial Seas." The PRC claimed a 12-mile limit on its territorial waters, using the straight baseline method of establishing boundaries. This in effect declared the South China Sea to be a "Chinese Lake" and reasserted Beijing's claims to the entire Spratly group, as well as the other South China Sea archipelagos. South Vietnam did not protest Beijing's declaration, and the Spratlys received little more attention from either government for the next fifteen years.³⁵

In the absence of PRC or Vietnamese activity, Taiwan and the Philippines undertook efforts to consolidate their claims in the Spratlys. Concerned with a buildup of PRC

forces in the Paracels and the potential threat to Taiwan, Taipei continued to fortify its Itu Aba garrison and occupy other islands of the Spratly group during the 1960s.³⁶ In 1971 an unarmed Philippine vessel was reportedly fired upon by either Taiwanese naval patrol units or artillery based on Itu Aba, eliciting a protest from Manila and a demand for the withdrawal of all Taiwanese forces from the island.³⁷ The Philippine government used the incident to finally grant formal recognition to the Cloma claim and deployed navy and marine units to underscore their stand on sovereignty over the islands. In another flurry of diplomatic protests, Beijing, Taipei, and Saigon all denounced Manila's actions. The Philippines refused to back down and began to fortify its positions in the Spratlys.³⁸

In the summer of 1973 South Vietnam formally incorporated ten islands of the Spratly group into its provincial administrative structure and sent several hundred troops to occupy five of them during the following three months. In January 1974 Beijing formally denounced Saigon's "reckless violation of [China's] national sovereignty," restating its claim to sovereignty over all four South China Sea archipelagos.³⁹ In this instance, however, Beijing went beyond diplomatic protest and promptly launched an attack against Vietnamese garrisons in the Paracels. Chinese and Vietnamese military forces engaged in a series of battles during January. Although the two sides' accounts of the

conflict differ, by the end of January 1974 the PRC controlled the entire Paracel archipelago.⁴⁰

The Sino-Vietnamese conflict in the Paracels fueled the continuing multilateral contest for the Spratly Islands. On 22 January South Vietnamese forces withdrew from the Paracels to six islands in the Spratly group, where they were reinforced by air and sea. Alarmed by the PRC military actions in the Paracel Islands, Taiwan immediately began to reinforce its garrison on Itu Aba. Taipei deployed two destroyers to the Spratlys in late January and sent another two destroyers and two landing ships to Itu Aba shortly thereafter. By August Taipei had established regular air and sea communication between Taiwan and Itu Aba. Manila also dispatched naval and marine units to support its Spratly claim, which included five of the archipelago's main islands.⁴¹

The first week of February witnessed a new round of heated protests, as tensions among the Spratly claimants increased. However, Beijing's warnings--underscored by the stationing of a seven-ship PLA naval task force off Hainan--encouraged Saigon, Manila, and Taipei to seek some form of accommodation, averting a military conflict. Although the U.S. took no position on the dispute, the American ambassador in Saigon reportedly pressured South Vietnam to reduce its forces in the Spratlys to avoid provoking a confrontation.⁴²

The Paracels conflict between China and South Vietnam also caused a reassessment in Hanoi, which had previously given its tacit support to the PRC's South China Sea claims.⁴³ As Haller-Trost notes, North Vietnam was eager to avoid friction with China, its powerful ally in the Vietnam War, but moved towards a more neutral position on the archipelago disputes after January 1974.⁴⁴

In April 1975, shortly before the fall of Saigon, Vietnamese communist forces took possession of the six islands of the Spratly group held by South Vietnam since January 1974. By 1976 Vietnam had quietly occupied another seven islands and established military installations on five of them, including a small airstrip on Spratly Island.⁴⁵ Hanoi was now in direct conflict with Beijing over China's Spratly claims.

In March 1976 the Philippines created a new military command for the defense of its Spratly claim. In June 1978 the Philippine government proclaimed sovereignty over the "Kalayaan Islands Group" despite agreements made earlier that year with Hanoi and Beijing to handle their Spratlys dispute "in a spirit of conciliation and friendship."⁴⁶ The area at issue was nearly identical to the original Cloma claim and included islands occupied by Taiwanese and Vietnamese forces, in addition to those under Philippine control.⁴⁷

Malaysia entered the Spratlys dispute in December 1979, with the publication of an official map which listed eleven reefs and cays in the southeast portion of the archipelago as Malaysian territory.⁴⁸ The Malaysian claim conflicted with those of China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Although Hanoi and Manila issued public protests, Beijing reportedly conveyed its protests to the Malaysian government through private diplomatic channels.⁴⁹

Between May and August 1983, Kuala Lumpur deployed troops to Swallow Reef, the largest of the Spratly features claimed. This action did elicit a public, though mild, protest from China which "only reaffirmed its claim to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands (including Swallow Reef) in general, and did not denounce Malaysia in specific terms."⁵⁰ In November 1986 Kuala Lumpur sent platoons to two other Spratly reefs.⁵¹

As of 1990, Malaysia reportedly occupied four reefs and cays in the Spratly group and had installed navigation beacons on another two. Among the other Spratly features claimed are two currently occupied by Vietnam. Another, Louisa Reef (where Malaysia has constructed a beacon) is also claimed by Brunei.⁵² In addition to its military and navigation presence, Malaysia has also opened a fifteen-room resort on Swallow Reef, where it hopes to develop tourism.⁵³

Although Brunei maintains no presence in the archipelago, it is generally considered the sixth Spratlys

claimant. (Some sources count only five claimants.) According to Haller-Trost, Brunei's claim originated with Britain's 1958 extension of the boundaries of its Borneo possessions to include the continental shelf. Both Malaysia and Brunei have since established their territorial seas based on the continental shelf, resulting in an area of overlapping claims which includes Louisa Reef.⁵⁴

Military Conflict in the Spratly Islands

In June 1986 the PLAN conducted its first major exercise in the western Pacific and began regular patrols in Spratly waters. This heightened concern among the other Spratly claimants and may have prompted Malaysia's dispatch of additional troops in November. Vietnam restated its claim to the Spratlys in April 1987 and occupied a fourteenth island in the group. That same month, Beijing sent a sizable scientific expedition to conduct surveys of the Spratly Islands under UNESCO auspices.⁵⁵

During the following months, China increased its activity in the Spratly Islands significantly. The PLAN conducted a second large-scale exercise in the Spratlys during May and June and additional exercises between October and November.⁵⁶ Chang Pao-min observes in "A New Scramble for the South China Sea Islands,"

The series of naval exercises was explicitly meant to "enhance the navy's capacity to carry out medium- and long-distance operation" and demonstrated China's capability to wage battle fairly far from home shores. With the benefit of

hindsight, China's increased naval activities in the Spratlys had all been connected with a decision to secure its first foothold in the archipelago, and by the end of 1987, all preparations had apparently been completed for China to act.⁵⁷

Additionally, in July 1987 Beijing declared the Spratly archipelago a part of China's newly created Hainan province.⁵⁸

In early 1988 Beijing and Hanoi exchanged heated protests and accusations over China's actions, as relations between them deteriorated. China stepped up its naval patrols in the Spratlys and reportedly began construction of facilities on Fiery Cross Reef to establish a permanent military base. Vietnam responded by occupying another four islets, bringing its total to eighteen, as the PRC seized a few more reefs.⁵⁹

On 13 March 1988 Beijing formally designated Hainan Island as China's 23rd province, inclusive of the Spratly archipelago.⁶⁰ The following day Chinese and Vietnamese military forces clashed in a brief, but violent, battle at Johnson South Reef in the Spratly Islands. China and Vietnam have accused each other of firing the first shot.⁶¹ Despite conflicting accounts of the battle, analysts reportedly agree that the PRC clearly (and intentionally) provoked the incident.⁶² The PLAN decisively defeated the Vietnamese forces at Johnson South Reef, sinking three supply ships and killing or capturing over 80 Vietnamese sailors.⁶³ However, unlike the 1974 Sino-Vietnamese conflict which left China in sole possession of the Paracel

Islands, the 1988 battle produced no clear decision on the Spratlys dispute.

Both China and Vietnam bolstered their naval presence in Spratly waters following the conflict. Vietnam reportedly increased its reconnaissance flights in the region and deployed a 30-ship task force to the Spratlys. Beijing dispatched its own flotilla of 20 more formidable ships, including a submarine. The PLAN also increased its patrols and conducted an amphibious exercise in the archipelago.⁶⁴ By late July China completed construction of an oceanographic observation station on Fiery Cross Reef.⁶⁵ The reef has also reportedly been built up to create an artificial harbor for China's South Sea Fleet.⁶⁶

Following the March clash, China occupied three additional reefs, for a total of seven. By May 1988 construction of military facilities had reportedly begun on at least two of the reefs. Vietnam also seized another three islets, placing a total of 21 islands and features under its control.⁶⁷ The Sino-Vietnamese military dispute prompted other Spratlys claimants to act as well. The Philippines placed its Spratly garrison on alert and deployed additional marines and artillery to the islands it occupies. In April Taipei reinforced its garrison on Itu Aba. The Taiwanese Navy conducted an emergency resupply of the Itu Aba forces in mid-March and another supply mission in August, when it conducted naval exercises en route.⁶⁸

Heightened sensitivities also led to disputes between Manila and Kuala Lumpur over alleged violations of territorial waters and the seizure of fishing vessels, and Malaysia announced in September that it would expand the capabilities of its military services.⁶⁹

Private Claims to the Spratly Islands

In addition to the Spratly Islands claims put forth by national governments, two instances of independent states proclaimed within the territory of the archipelago appear in the literature. Although neither of these claims by private citizens bears directly on the ongoing conflict, they deserve mention if only because they help to illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of the Spratlys dispute.

Samuels provides a detailed account of the "Kingdom of Humanity" or "Republic of Morac-Songhrati-Meads" which dates to 1914. This claim is based on the alleged discovery of the Spratly archipelago in the late 1870s by Captain James George Meads, who named the area the Sea of Humanity and dubbed the largest feature (Itu Aba) "Meads Island." Meads reportedly established a colony on several of the islands, leading to the foundation of the independent Kingdom of Humanity in 1914. (A group of colonists broke away to form the independent Republic of Morac-Songhrati-Meads in 1959, but the two colonies reunited four years later.)⁷⁰

Following the public announcement of the Tomas Cloma claim in 1956, members of the colony attempted to gain formal recognition on behalf of Captain Meads' great-grandson, "the present exclusive owner and sole sovereign, Morton Frederick Meads."⁷¹ According to Samuels, the claim was submitted to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the U.S. Board of Geographic Names and the U.S. embassy in Manila. Although the United States did not formally recognize the claim, neither was it entirely dismissed as spurious. A September 1968 letter from the Assistant Geographer of the U.S. State Department to a representative of the Kingdom/Republic stated, "The United States Government considers the sovereignty to be undetermined over the islands and reefs which constitute the Paracel and Spratly islands, as well as those of the more general term, Dangerous Ground."⁷² Samuels suggests that, while the letter indicated the United States considered none of the existing national claims more valid than the others, it indirectly granted the Meads claim equal status with them.⁷³

Samuels also relates a version of the Meads story which asserts that Morton F. Meads was actually a former U.S. Army serviceman who established the Kingdom upon his "discovery" of the islands shortly after his 1946 military discharge in Manila. Meads reportedly became the agent for a private group already resident in the islands who intended

to exploit the archipelago's natural resources for commercial profit. He also planned a fake postage stamp scheme to defraud international collectors. (Philippine authorities arrested Meads in 1955, but later dropped all charges.)⁷⁴ As the Meads saga is apparently fraught with gaps and inconsistencies, this account is equally plausible. Nonetheless, the Spratly Islands episode of the Kingdom of Humanity/Republic of Morac-Songhrati-Meads ended with the drowning at sea of its founders in 1972.⁷⁵

Dieter Heinzig reports another little known claim to the Spratlys, the 1974 establishment of the "Republic of Luconia" comprising the southeastern portion of the archipelago. Its president, Aloysius George Guarghias-Irgen, was formerly the European representative of Kalayaan, but apparently chose to pursue his own interests instead. He allegedly had "flown over" the area in question in 1971 and "[set] foot on the principal island" (not further identified) in 1974, thereby taking possession of the territory of "Luconia."⁷⁶ As of 1976, according to Heinzig, the Luconian government planned to deploy a ship off North Luconia Shoals (5°35'N latitude by 112°30'E longitude) on a permanent basis; however, no further mention of Luconia or its founders appears in the literature. Heinzig deduces from its location that the Luconia claim was probably a front for either governmental or private interests in the area's potential oil resources.⁷⁷

Legal Issues and the Spratly Islands Dispute

The legal aspects of the Spratly Islands dispute involve both the traditional principles of territorial acquisition under international law and the Law of the Sea. Although the dispute is unlikely to be settled on the basis of these legal principles alone, they, like the history of the various claims, provide some insight into the roots of the dispute. The legal issues summarized here are treated in greater depth in Haller-Trost's study and in the legal and professional journal articles cited.

Haller-Trost provides an excellent summation of the five means of territorial acquisition (occupation, prescription, cession, conquest, and accretion, and avulsion) under the principles of international law as they apply to the Spratlys dispute. Occupation as a basis for valid title requires that a state exercise continuous "effective control" over the territory in question.⁷⁸ Under this principle, mere discovery and intermittent use or occupation are not sufficient to assert sovereignty. Despite activity in the Spratly group by various claimants prior to World War II, none demonstrated continuous control and governance over the archipelago, thereby establishing a valid claim. Although France annexed several of the islands on behalf of its protectorate Vietnam in 1933, it did not effectively govern and administer them.⁷⁹

The second method of acquisition is prescription, described as "a peaceful, unopposed and continuous manner of

governance by one state, while the territory actually belongs to another."⁸⁰ In view of the numerous protests and demarches which followed various claimants' actions in the Spratlys, the condition of "unopposed governance" cannot be met in this case. In addition, application of this principle to the Spratlys dispute would require a claimant to acknowledge the archipelago as the former territory of another nation. China in particular cannot employ the principle of prescription, as it resolutely maintains that no other state has ever held valid title to the Spratlys.⁸¹

Cession refers to "the forced or voluntary transfer of territory from one state to another."⁸² Although the 1887 Sino-French border convention ceded the islands east of 105°43'E longitude to China, as discussed above, its application to the Spratly Islands is questionable because no southern and northern borders were delineated. Furthermore, neither the PRC nor Vietnam can base their claims to the archipelago on this convention, as both reject the treaty itself as invalid.⁸³

Claims to territory acquired by conquest during armed conflict prior to the end of World War II are still recognized as valid until international law (although the mode itself is no longer considered a legal basis of territorial acquisition). However, this method requires both a peace treaty granting the victorious state title to the territory and its formal annexation by national

legislation.⁸⁴ Although the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and the 1952 Sino-Japanese Treaty might have been proper vehicles for the transfer of legal title to the Spratlys, they are ambiguous on the matter of devolution, as discussed earlier. Therefore, it cannot be indisputably determined from the treaties to whom Japan ceded the Spratlys.⁸⁵ As Haller-Trost observes, however, Japan's required renunciation of its claims in the San Francisco Peace Treaty suggests that the Allied powers recognized a valid Japanese claim to the archipelago established between 1939 and 1945 by effective occupation and governance.⁸⁶

France's inaction towards the Spratlys following World War II would have invalidated any prior French claims, even if it had (as appears unlikely) established sovereignty over the islands in the 1930's. Although the French placed a marker on Itu Aba in late 1946, they did not protest Chinese occupation of the island shortly thereafter.⁸⁷ Furthermore, as a signatory to the Treaty of San Francisco, France in effect relinquished any claim to the Spratlys by failing to reassert its sovereignty or institute national legislation to annex the islands following Japan's renunciation.⁸⁸ France then had no valid title to the Spratly Islands to pass to Vietnam upon the dissolution of the French colonial government in Indochina.⁸⁹ Haller-Trost also argues that there is no clear evidence that France in fact ceded the Spratlys to either North or South Vietnam at

the time of the French withdrawal, as it did in the case of the Paracels.⁹⁰

Although National China effectively occupied Itu Aba in 1947, its control lapsed between 1950 and 1956. Sources differ on whether Taiwanese forces began to maintain a continuous presence, and thereby assert *continuous effective control*, in 1956 or 1963 (following several years of intermittent patrols and visits).⁹¹ Nonetheless, under the principle of occupation, Taipei can make a valid claim to this island at least since 1963 and very possibly earlier. Vietnam's claim to the six islands first occupied by the Saigon government between 1973 and 1974, as well as those subsequently seized under the Hanoi regime is probably equally valid.⁹²

According to Haller-Trost, the Philippine Spratly Islands claim has less validity than those of Taiwan and Vietnam because territorial claims asserted by private citizens do not imply government jurisdiction or sovereignty.⁹³ However, Katchen disagrees, concluding that the Philippine government has a valid claim to the islands which it has since occupied.⁹⁴ China's claim to its Spratly holdings is more difficult to support under the principle of effective occupation. The PRC exercised control over no portion of the archipelago until it seized several islands during the 1988 Sino-Vietnamese conflict. This does not

meet the requirements for a valid claim by effective occupation under the principles of international law.⁹⁵

The final means of territorial acquisition, accretion and avulsion, concern the emersion of new island formations from the ocean floor. This principle, though still recognized under international law, is not an issue in conflicting Spratly Islands claims.

Of the five principles discussed, effective occupation appears most relevant to the Spratlys dispute. However, attempts to evaluate the relative validity of competing claims under this principle encounter two difficulties. First, effective occupation and control of one or more islands does not imply title to the entire archipelago under the principles of international law. In addition, only territory considered *res nullius* is subject to acquisition by occupation; those islands already claimed by another nation cannot be acquired under this principle, even if they have not previously been occupied.⁹⁶

Malaysia's 1979 Spratly Islands claim relies primarily upon the Law of the Sea rather than traditional principles of territorial acquisition. Specifically, Malaysia maintains its right to that portion of the archipelago within the waters of its continental shelf on the basis of the Continental Shelf doctrine. However, as Haller-Trost notes, the establishment of a maritime zone such as a territorial sea or exclusive economic zone does

not imply title to islands within that zones under the Law of the Sea. Rather, valid title to an island or island group may be used to claim a maritime zone.⁹⁷

In contrast to islands, however, submerged formations are considered part of the seabed. As such, Malaysia could claim several submerged reefs and shoals of the Spratly group as part of its continental shelf, with "sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting" their natural resources.⁹⁸ Although the Law of the Sea does little to establish the relative validity of competing Spratly Islands claims, it is an important factor in assessing the strategic and economic implications of one claimant acquiring valid title to the archipelago. These aspects of the Law of the Sea relative to the Spratlys dispute will be discussed in the following chapter.

Neither the principle of territorial acquisition nor the Law of the Sea provides a clear answer to the question of legal sovereignty over the Spratly Islands. This is best illustrated by the marked difference in conclusions drawn from virtually identical historical and legal facts. Analyses by Hungdah Chiu and Choon-Ho Park and by Tao Cheng conclude that China has the strongest claim to the archipelago, although the former base their argument on "immemorial possession" and the latter on post-World War II occupation. (Neither of these sources distinguish between PRC and Taiwanese claims.)⁹⁹ Martin H. Katchen concludes

that the Philippines claim to the Kalayaan group of islands, with the single exception of Spratly Island proper, is "the most orthodox claim." He also asserts that Taiwan has a valid claim to Itu Aba, as does Vietnam to Spratly Island.¹⁰⁰ Haller-Trost agrees that Taiwan established a valid claim to Itu Aba based on effective occupation, but finds little else in the principles of international law to support any other claim to the Spratly Islands. His is perhaps the most accurate assessment of the legal status of the Spratlys dispute:

There seems to be no solution for the problem in contemporary international law. The only common basis between the states involved is that all contestants attempt now to justify their claims on its principles.¹⁰¹

The Spratly Islands dispute will not likely be settled in an international legal forum. Instead, the competitors will pursue their claims according to their own interests, capabilities, and limitations. The central issue is whether there is sufficient convergence of interests to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement, such as an agreement for joint development of resources, or whether the dispute will lead to another military conflict in the South China Sea.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 3

A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF THE SPRATLY ISLANDS DISPUTE

Identifying the Problem

The Spratly Islands: A Potential Flashpoint

The Spratly Islands dispute is a complex problem involving a number of competing interests. The unresolved conflict over claims to the archipelago undermines the stability of the region and, despite recent diplomatic initiatives, remains a highly volatile flashpoint. The involvement of three member nations in the dispute could prove divisive to ASEAN and will test its strength as a regional arbitor. Although ASEAN has played a crucial role in the Cambodian peace process, the Spratlys conflict sets the organization's ability to broker a peaceful solution against the competing interests of its members.

The Spratlys dispute affects relations between Vietnam and its ASEAN neighbors--relations that had witnessed some improvement since the conclusion of a Cambodian peace settlement. The conflict has more far reaching implications for China's future role in the region. China is the sole Spratlys contestant capable of enforcing its claim through unilateral military action, and Beijing's

refusal to negotiate the issue of Spratlys sovereignty only heightens regional fears of Chinese hegemony.

Despite recent improvements in Sino-Vietnamese relations, the conflict in Spratlys claims between Beijing and Hanoi remains the most contentious. Their territorial dispute could easily trigger another Sino-Vietnamese military confrontation, particularly in light of the perceived South China Sea power vacuum created by the Soviet withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay and the closure of U.S. military bases in the Philippines. A major military conflict over the Spratly Islands would threaten regional security, altering the regional balance of power, disrupting economic development, and impeding access to critical sealanes. Until a resolution of the Spratlys dispute acceptable to all parties (especially China) can be achieved, the islands will remain a potential flashpoint, raising tensions, undermining regional stability, and limiting the exploration and commercial development of offshore resources.

The regional instability fomented by the Spratly Islands dispute threatens U.S. strategic and regional interests in Southeast Asia. The United States supports economic growth, the strengthening of democratic institutions, and the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts. The Spratlys dispute and its potential for military confrontation undermine these objectives.

Furthermore, unrestricted transit of South China Sea SLOCs is critical to the security and economic interests of the U.S. and its allies. The establishment of sovereignty over the entire Spratly archipelago by a single state poses a potential threat to these sea lanes. Control of the Spratlys would greatly increase a regional power's ability to restrict the use of international shipping corridors, economically isolate other nations in the region by interdicting their primary trade routes, and interfere with the transit of military and strategic supplies between the Pacific and Indian Oceans in a time of crisis. This is of particular concern in the case of China, which views the South China Sea as its historical territorial waters and does not recognize the international right to *innocent passage*. Although Washington has thus far remained neutral on the Spratlys issue, any change in the situation which threatened access to these sea and air corridors would almost certainly draw the United States into the conflict.

Essential Assumptions

The analysis of the Spratly Islands dispute presented here assumes that:

1. None of the six claimants will unilaterally renounce its present claims to the Spratly Islands.
2. ASEAN, under Indonesia's leadership, will continue efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the dispute.

3. The Spratly Islands dispute can be resolved independent of other territorial disputes (e.g., Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, Philippine claims to portions of Malaysian east Sabah, Indonesian-Malaysian dispute over Sipadan and Ligitan Islands, etc.) in the region.

U.S. National Interests and Elements of Power

The Spratly Islands: U.S. Strategic and Regional Interests

Defining U.S. Interests

U.S. national interests in the Spratly Islands dispute must be viewed in the context of broader regional and strategic interests in East Asia and the Pacific. As in other areas of the world, the United States seeks regional stability and security, political development and democratization, economic integration, and unrestricted access to resources and markets.¹ American security and economic interests also require free and safe navigation on the high seas and along critical SLOCs. In support of these interests, the U.S. maintains bilateral trade, defense, and military access agreements with various nations of the East Asia-Pacific region.

Bilateral Relations

U.S. national strategy in the region has centered primarily on relations with Japan, China, and Korea. American economic and security ties with Japan have made this relationship "the keystone" of American engagement in

Asia.² Similarly, the U.S. defense alliance with the Republic of Korea and a commitment to deter North Korean aggression are principal elements of Washington's regional strategy. Finally, China, a major actor in East Asia and the Pacific and, until recently, an important counterweight to the Soviet Union, occupies a pivotal position in U.S. global and regional security strategy.

As one of the six Spratlys claimants, Beijing figures prominently in U.S. interests in the Spratly Islands. However, the role played by China--the world's most populous country, a nuclear and military power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council--in American security strategy goes well beyond this territorial dispute in the South China Sea. Sino-American relations are both complex and politically sensitive, particularly since the 1989 bloodshed in Tiananmen Square.

U.S. policy towards China over the matter of the Spratlys dispute cannot be formulated independently of Washington's overall China strategy, which encompasses more visible issues, such as human rights abuses, global weapons proliferation, and unfair trade practices. Any U.S. Spratly Islands policy will be influenced by these other concerns. Nonetheless, a U.S. policy which supports efforts to achieve a diplomatic solution and discourages military action by China in the Spratlys could help reduce tensions and promote regional cooperation, thereby enhancing regional stability.

As a senior U.S. Department of Defense official has observed, "In short, it is impossible to envision stability and peace in Asia in the absence of a positive role by China."³

During the Cold War, the primary aim of U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia was to limit Soviet inroads while maintaining U.S. access and influence throughout the region. The United States must now pursue a different approach to promoting regional stability under a new balance of power configuration. Washington continues to move slowly towards normalization of relations with Vietnam. Progress in this area has been tied to the resolution of the Cambodian conflict and a full accounting of Vietnam War POWs and MIAs by Hanoi.⁴ Establishment of full diplomatic relations will also open the door to trade and commercial investment in Vietnam, including development of Vietnam's offshore resources, thereby bringing American economic interests into play. U.S. policy towards the Spratly Islands must take into account these various interests in Vietnam--and must balance them against U.S. interests in China and in the ASEAN nations, as well.

ASEAN

ASEAN plays an important role in promoting regional stability and economic growth, areas where its interests clearly converge with those of the United States. Relations with ASEAN, America's fifth largest trading

partner, are based on "economic, political and security cooperation."⁵ Washington has recognized the importance of ASEAN's role in achieving a Cambodian peace agreement.⁶ Similarly, ASEAN's efforts under Indonesian leadership to negotiate a Spratlys settlement support U.S. interests in promoting regional security and the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.

The United States maintains formal defense alliances with two ASEAN member nations, Thailand and the Philippines. The latter could draw the U.S. into the Spratlys dispute as a result of the Philippine military presence in archipelago. Philippine officials have argued that the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty obligates the U.S. to come to Manila's assistance in the event of a conflict in the South China Sea. However, Washington does not recognize any of the disputed Spratly Islands as Philippine territory and, therefore, subject to the treaty.⁷

The Mutual Defense Treaty does provide for defense against an armed attack on either party's "armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."⁸ This would suggest that Manila could invoke the treaty in the event of a military attack against a Philippine ship operating in Spratly waters, although U.S. treaty obligations in such a situation are somewhat vague. U.S. interests would best be served by avoiding entirely any military conflict in the

Spratly Islands which might force a test of the treaty's limits.

Balance of Power and Strategic Access

Averting a violent confrontation among Spratly Islands claimants would support other U.S. interests and objectives in Southeast Asia. A military conflict in the South China Sea could alter the regional balance of power and disrupt strategic SLOCs. Sovereignty over the Spratly archipelago would extend the national territory of any of the claimants well beyond its current borders. Under the control of a single nation, the Spratlys would provide valuable bases for surveillance, maritime interdiction, and both offensive and defensive military operations.⁹

The majority of claimants do not possess the military forces necessary to seize and hold the entire archipelago or to exploit its military potential. China is very likely the one exception, as demonstrated by its successful military actions against Vietnam in the Paracels in 1974 and the Spratlys in 1988 and by ongoing PLA naval and air force modernization programs. Chinese control of the entire Spratly group, along with the Paracels (which Beijing seized in 1974), could turn the South China Sea into a virtual "Chinese Lake." Fears of Chinese hegemony could, in turn, fuel a destabilizing arms race in the region. (The diversion of scarce resources from domestic programs to defense could also foster internal instability in the

region's less prosperous nations, limiting progress towards democratization.)

The United States considers the right to unimpeded navigation on the high seas an incontrovertible principle of international law and vital to U.S. security interests. (The U.S. Navy regularly conducts Freedom of Navigation operations, known as "FON Ops," to exercise the right of transit beyond the 12 mile limit in those areas where nations claim more extensive territorial waters.) The South China Sea SLOCs are especially critical because they link East Asia and the Pacific with the Malacca Straits, Indian Ocean, and Southwest Asia. Over 90 percent of Japan's oil, as well as much of that destined for Taiwan and the Republic of Korea is transported via international shipping lanes in close proximity to the Spratly Islands.¹⁰ Interdiction of these SLOCs would impede access to resources and markets and hinder international trade. Any change in the military situation in the South China Sea which might jeopardize sealane transit would directly threaten U.S. strategic and economic interests.

Although the United States is not a signatory to the 1982 Third UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), certain provisions bear directly on U.S. interests in freedom of navigation. Under pressure from maritime nations (including the U.S.), UNCLOS III limited the rights of coastal states to interfere with navigation in international

sealanes under the regimes of *innocent passage*, *transit passage*, and *sealane passage*.¹¹

The U.S. maintains that the right of innocent passage has been accepted under customary international law.¹² Innocent passage refers to the passage of any vessel "so long as it is not prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal State."¹³ UNCLOS III specifies certain activities, such as weapons exercises, naval flight operations, intelligence collection, customs and immigration violations, hydrographic research and surveys, environmental pollution, and fishing as inconsistent with innocent passage.¹⁴

The right of transit passage protects "freedom of navigation and overflight solely for the purpose of continuous and expeditious transit" through international straits.¹⁵ UNCLOS III prohibits states bordering on international straits from restricting or suspending the innocent passage of any foreign vessels through those straits.¹⁶ However, the regime of sealane passage is more restrictive and governs the passage of vessels through a state's territorial seas (limited by UNCLOS III to 12 nautical miles) and archipelagic waters. Under UNCLOS III a coastal state may temporarily suspend the right of innocent passage of foreign vessels in specified areas of its territorial sea "if such suspension is essential to the protection of its security."¹⁷ The same right is afforded

an archipelagic state within its archipelagic waters (defined as the waters within the baseline joining the outermost points of its outmost islands) and its surrounding territorial sea.¹⁸

The final text of the Convention specified that only archipelagic states--those composed wholly of one or more archipelagos--can claim jurisdiction over archipelagic waters. This is an important distinction from the earlier UNCLOS III negotiating text which implied the right of a coastal nation to claim the seas surrounding an adjacent archipelago over which it exercised sovereignty as its archipelagic waters and, as such, an extension of its territorial sea. (UNCLOS III also considered extending the territorial sea limit to 200 nautical miles, rather than the 12 mile limit ultimately recognized.) Under such a regime, either Vietnam or China--upon gaining sole possession of the Spratly archipelago--could have declared the primary SLOCs of the South China Sea as its archipelagic or territorial waters subject to the restrictions of sealane passage.¹⁹ Instead, of the six Spratly Islands claimants, only the Philippines meets the criteria of an archipelagic state, although even here it would stretch the UNCLOS definition to designate the waters between "Kalayaan" and the Philippine archipelago as contiguous archipelagic waters.²⁰

Although UNCLOS III guarantees unrestricted access to the South China Sea SLOCs under international law,

irrespective of sovereignty over the Spratly group, it is unclear whether Hanoi or Beijing would honor the Convention. Vietnam presently restricts access of foreign vessels within a 24 nautical mile wide "military warning zone," 12 miles beyond the recognized territorial sea. All military aircraft and warships are prohibited from entering the zone, and other aircraft and ships must request permission to transit--restrictions prohibited under the Law of the Sea.²¹ China does not claim territorial waters beyond the recognized 12 nautical mile limit. However, Beijing disputes the right of innocent passage for foreign vessels within its declared 12 mile territorial sea, reserving the right to impose restrictions beyond those permitted under the sealane passage regime.²² Therefore, while the provisions of UNCLOS III generally support U.S. interests in maintaining access to South China Sea SLOCs, the Convention alone might not preclude Vietnam or (more likely) China from imposing *de facto* restrictions on navigation in these sealanes.

The Spratly Islands dispute clearly involves a number of U.S. strategic and regional interests. The conflict undermines regional stability and security and poses a potential threat to strategic access and international shipping. Chinese military action to seize the entire archipelago could heighten regional fears and spark an escalating arms race, creating further instability.

U.S. policy towards the dispute must balance these concerns against the sometimes contrary objectives of its bilateral relationships and strategies within the region.

Elements of Power: U.S. Ability to Influence the Spratly Islands Dispute

The United States can promote an outcome to the Spratly Islands dispute favorable to its interests by applying the four elements of national power--diplomatic, economic, military, and informational--to encourage a peaceful resolution and dissuade claimants from attempting to seize control of the archipelago by military force. The instruments of power are most effectively employed in combination, as part of an integrated strategy designed to achieve specific objectives. For the purposes of this analysis, however, each of the four instruments will first be considered independently of the others in order to evaluate its advantages and disadvantages in influencing the Spratlys dispute.

Diplomatic

The United States can employ its diplomatic power to exert pressure on individual claimants and to lend support to multilateral negotiations and agreements. The ASEAN claimants--Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei--have all demonstrated a willingness to participate in some form of multilateral discussions to peacefully resolve the Spratlys dispute (although Kuala Lumpur and Manila have declared

their intentions to use force to defend their respective claims if attacked). Vietnam also endorsed the ASEAN foreign ministers' July 1992 South China Sea Declaration, which called for temporarily setting aside the issue of sovereignty in favor of cooperative efforts to develop the area's economic potential. In contrast, China, while expressing cautious support for the ASEAN-backed plan, continues to assert Beijing's absolute sovereignty over the entire archipelago and to pursue unilateral plans for exploiting its resources. Taiwan, which also maintains its claim to the entire Spratly group, called for joint development of resources at the earlier South China Sea workshop in Jakarta. (Taipei was not represented at the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting, attended by Chinese and Vietnamese officials.)

The U.S. has praised the Indonesian-led ASEAN initiative as "a good example of what one might call preventive diplomacy."²³ Washington supports peaceful negotiations to end the Spratlys conflict, but steadfastly refuses to choose sides in the dispute. Even a tactful admonition against "the use of force to resolve conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea" and "unilateral actions" carefully avoided pointing a cautionary finger at any specific claimant.²⁴

The U.S. can offer diplomatic support to ASEAN's efforts at resolving the Spratlys dispute at virtually no

cost; however, a few encouraging words are unlikely to provide much impetus to the negotiating process. Diplomatic pressure exerted on Beijing, the most reluctant participant in multilateral negotiations, might go further in stimulating regional discussions towards resolving the dispute, especially as China is the claimant most likely to undertake military action in the Spratlys. The European Community (EC), including permanent UN Security Council members Britain and France, has also endorsed the ASEAN South China Sea Declaration. However, France has taken a stronger public position than the U.S. regarding China's role and responsibilities in settling the Spratly Islands conflict. The French Deputy Foreign Minister declared in November 1992,

If China wants to maintain its current good relations between it and the other members of the Security Council it must take into account what I hardly dare call a warning but which is nonetheless a declaration.²⁵

Although the role of the EC in the Spratlys dispute is beyond the scope of this study, France's diplomatic efforts provide a useful contrast to current U.S. policy. While Paris is taking a hard diplomatic line with Beijing on the Spratlys, Washington is willing to downplay this particular issue, apparently more concerned with other objectives in Sino-American relations. Although a tougher U.S. stance against potential Chinese adventurism in the South China Sea might be more effective than Washington's

present generalities in deterring a military conflict, it would divert limited U.S. diplomatic leverage from higher priorities in America's China policy, such as human rights abuses. (Of note, French Deputy Foreign Minister Georges Kiejman argues that, unlike its human rights practices which China considers a purely internal affair and a question of national sovereignty, Beijing is sensitive to international reactions to its foreign policy. This would suggest that while the Spratlys dispute is of lower priority than Chinese human rights violations, it is an area in which Washington could probably exert greater influence.)²⁶

Although both ASEAN and Vietnam have welcomed international support for the South China Sea Declaration, a direct U.S. role (such as that played in the Cambodia peace process) would probably be of limited value and might even prove counterproductive in the Spratlys dispute. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed has argued against any U.S. interference in the Spratly Islands conflict (although he is primarily concerned about U.S. military intervention on behalf of the Philippines). He believes U.S. involvement would only undermine negotiations among the Spratlys claimants.²⁷

Manila seeks formal negotiations to resolve the Spratly Islands dispute, rather than the informal discussions which have so far been held at the three Indonesian-sponsored South China Sea workshops. However, UN

intervention in the negotiating process is unlikely in the near term, with UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali advocating a stronger role by regional organizations such as ASEAN in mediating localized disputes.²⁸ Should a greater UN role in achieving a Spratlys settlement emerge at later date, the U.S. might become a more active participant in the mediation process under UN auspices. For now, however, any U.S. offers to serve as an "honest broker" would probably not be well received by either ASEAN or the Spratlys claimants themselves.

Economic

The U.S. economic instrument of power is well suited to a combined "carrot and stick" approach to the Spratly Islands dispute. Because much of the interest in the archipelago concerns the area's potential oil and natural gas reserves, the U.S. can promote cooperative action by making joint development of those resources a more attractive option than unilateral action.

In recent years, the U.S. has imposed economic sanctions in response to international acts of aggression either unilaterally or in accordance with UN resolutions. Trade embargos and other sanctions have been employed against the Soviet Union, Iraq, and Serbia, among others, with varying effect. In the case of the Spratlys, the threat of economic penalties could help deter military

action by the competing claimants, particularly those with strong economic ties to the United States.

As ASEAN's largest export market, the U.S. could exert pressure on member nations to renounce the use of armed force as a means of settling the Spratlys dispute. However, these nations are unlikely to resort to military action except to defend their claims if attacked. Taiwan is in a much similar position. The most likely source of military conflict is a renewed Sino-Vietnamese confrontation in the South China Sea or, possibly, unilateral military action by Beijing to consolidate its claims over the entire Spratly group.

Until relations with Vietnam are normalized and the U.S. ban on trade, investment, and aid is lifted, Washington has little direct economic leverage on Hanoi. However, China, the most likely instigator of any future military conflict in the South China Sea, presents a better target for U.S. economic sanctions. With the extension of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status already the subject of a heated U.S. domestic debate, any Chinese attempt to seize the Spratlys by force could easily tilt the political balance against renewal. The U.S. could also impose restrictions on trade and investment in China in direct retaliation for the use of armed force in the Spratlys. Suggestions of such a U.S. response might help quash any

Chinese thoughts of military action and avert a confrontation over the archipelago.

The U.S. could promote cooperative efforts to develop the natural resources of the Spratlys by offering technical and economic assistance to any ASEAN-sanctioned joint development project and limiting U.S. private commercial activities in areas under dispute. Washington has repeatedly denied any official involvement in the Denver-based Crestone Energy Corporation's contract with China's National Offshore Oil Company for oil exploration in the Spratlys.²⁹ Nonetheless, the other five Spratlys claimants, who have denounced the May 1992 agreement, very likely infer at least tacit U.S. government approval, if only due to the presence of an American embassy official at the signing of the contract.³⁰

Crestone's oil contract is not the first in the disputed Spratly archipelago involving a U.S. company. In the 1970s, Manila awarded an oil concession in the contested Reed Bank area to a U.S.-Swedish consortium in which Amoco owned a 38.5 percent interest. Amoco conducted offshore drilling operations in the area on behalf of the consortium (with some success) using a U.S.-registered drill ship, reportedly in direct disregard of U.S. State Department advice.³¹

Military

The U.S. can apply its military power both to deter the use of armed force by the Spratly Islands contestants and to intervene in the event that deterrence fails. The U.S. regional military presence has for many years provided a security umbrella in Southeast Asia, permitting the ASEAN nations to focus their attention on domestic security and economic concerns rather than external defense. The recent U.S. withdrawal from Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Station in the Philippines, coupled with the global drawdown of U.S. forces in the post-Cold War era, has raised concern among these nations of a power vacuum resulting from U.S. disengagement in the region. At their July 1992 meeting in Manila, the six ASEAN foreign ministers called upon the U.S. to maintain its military presence and ensure the balance of power in the region.³² They fear that a perceived reduction in the U.S. commitment to regional security could tempt China, the major military power in the South China Sea region, to attempt to consolidate its control over the Spratly group by armed force.

The 1990 Department of Defense East Asia Security Initiative (EASI) proposed an approximate eleven percent reduction in the 135,000 U.S. military personnel forward deployed to the Asia-Pacific region over a three year period. These initial cuts would be followed by proportionally greater reductions, implemented gradually in accordance with an overall reorganization of the U.S. force

structure. The intent of the EASI was to ensure a forward military presence adequate to meet U.S. regional commitments and objectives in a changing security environment within domestic fiscal constraints.³³ In a May 1992 address to the Pacific Rim Forum, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Solomon reiterated U.S. intentions to maintain a continued security presence in support of new regional defense strategies which have replaced the Cold War containment policy:

In the Asia-Pacific, what had been a secondary aspect of our strategic policy is now the primary rationale for our continuing security engagement: to provide balance, to prevent a strategic "empty space" from developing, to reassure allies, and to maintain a working presence in case of regional contingencies.³⁴

The U.S. forward presence in Southeast Asia now relies more upon mobile forces and guaranteed access to a diverse group of regional military facilities in place of permanent basing agreements. Along with planned increases in bilateral exercises with the region's noncommunist military forces, this change in basing arrangements and force deployment might be turned to an advantage in the South China Sea by highlighting U.S. ties and shared security interests with the ASEAN member nations (both those involved in the Spratlys dispute and those not).

Should deterrence fail, the U.S. retains the capability to execute military operations in the Spratly Islands either to assist those under attack or to ensure

freedom of navigation and sealane access. Either China or Vietnam, upon gaining complete control of the archipelago might attempt to impose restrictions on navigation in Spratly waters beyond those permitted under international law. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Chinese and Vietnamese positions on freedom of navigation and the right to innocent passage.) In response to such action, the U.S. could employ naval FON Ops to reemphasize its interests in guaranteeing unrestricted access to the South China Sea SLOCs.

The U.S. ambassador to the Philippines reportedly warned that the U.S. will intervene in the Spratlys "if armed conflicts threaten the security of the region, especially its allies."³⁵ Although none of the Spratlys claimants possesses naval, air, or amphibious capabilities to match those of U.S. Pacific forces, direct U.S. military intervention in the Spratlys would nonetheless incur greater costs than a routine forward presence in the area aimed at deterrence. However, U.S. operations in coalition with ASEAN or other regional naval and air forces could minimize the political and diplomatic costs of military action in the Spratlys.

Informational

In the Spratly Islands dispute, the informational element of power can be used most effectively to support and reinforce other diplomatic, economic, and military

initiatives. Washington can employ both formal and informal communications with the national leadership of the claimant nations to ensure that its position on the conflict is clearly understood. In the case of the non-communist states (and, to a lesser extent, the communist states, as well) the U.S. can also communicate its intentions regarding the Spratlys directly to the general population.

Regional forums such as the annual ASEAN foreign ministers meeting provide an excellent vehicle for the U.S. to state its opposition to the use of armed force in the Spratly Islands and its support for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. By calling attention to U.S. concerns about the conflict in speeches and in interviews with regional media, senior government officials can emphasize continuing U.S. interest in the situation without endorsing a particular claim to the archipelago. The U.S. can communicate its willingness to apply sanctions or intervene militarily if an armed conflict in the South China Sea should threaten U.S. strategic and regional interests. Although the informational element of power is among the least costly to employ, it will be effective only if U.S. policy statements are consistent and government officials ensure they do not send contradictory signals regarding U.S. intentions.

Other Relevant Actors: Interests, Capabilities and
Likely Courses of Action

Actors in the Spratly Islands Dispute

The other relevant actors in the Spratly Islands dispute considered here are the six Spratlys claimants and ASEAN, in its role as a regional organization. These are the actors whose interests, capabilities, and likely courses of action regarding the Spratlys most directly concern U.S. regional and strategic interests. This is not to suggest that other regional and extra-regional nations (such as Japan and France, respectively) do not have strategic interests in the Spratlys situation. However, they are not directly involved in the dispute and are, therefore, beyond the scope of this study.

Competing Interests in the Spratly Islands

The Spratly Islands dispute involves the strategic, territorial, and economic interests of the six contestants, as well as the broader interests of both claimant and non-claimant nations in regional stability. Each of the claimants recognizes the potential strategic and economic value of the Spratly group both to itself and to its rivals in the dispute. However, China's interests in the archipelago go much deeper and are founded on the resolute belief that Spratly Islands were the sovereign territory of ancient China and remain an intrinsic part of the modern Chinese state. As Samuels notes, the South China Sea, traditionally called the Nan Hai or Southern Sea by the

Chinese, has been China's "principal gateway to the world for some two thousand years" and has "helped shape the geographical cognita of the Chinese world order."³⁶

This irrendentist view of the region may explain, at least in part, why Beijing is particularly immovable on the issue of Spratlys sovereignty, even while it is willing to discuss possible joint development ventures. Samuels suggests an important linkage between China's historic past and its self-image as a modern power:

Both as symbol and in reality, the occupation of the Paracel Islands and persistent claim to the Spratly Archipelago affirm the growth of China as a major maritime power in Asia, one of whose principal goals is to reassert an historic presence in the southern maritime frontier.³⁷

If sovereignty over the Spratlys is in fact a question of national image for China, Beijing is unlikely to change its position on this particular aspect of the dispute.

Strategic and Territorial Interests

China, Vietnam, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Taiwan and the Philippines have the greatest strategic interests in the Spratly Islands. The first three of these contestants lay claim to the entire archipelago. As discussed earlier, complete control of the islands would provide forward bases and staging areas for regional surveillance activities, maritime interdiction, and military operations. Beijing has embarked on modernization programs for the PLAN and PLAAF in order to increase China's power

projection capabilities, which would be further enhanced by gaining sole possession of all existing and potential naval and air bases in the South China Sea archipelagos. For Vietnam, the Spratlys are strategically significant in limiting Chinese territorial expansion and regional hegemony (particularly at Hanoi's direct expense). The Spratly Islands, either under Vietnamese or neutral control, can also provide Vietnam with a defensive buffer against China in the South China Sea.

Although it claims all of the Spratlys, Taipei has made no effort to extend its control beyond Itu Aba, which provides Taiwan with a valuable forward base in the South China Sea. Nonetheless, the strategic and territorial importance of the archipelago to Taiwan is twofold. The Taipei government lays claim to the archipelago as the professed rightful ruler of all China and largely on the basis of the same historical argument put forth by Beijing. Additionally, China's seizure of the entire archipelago through the use of armed force against the other Spratlys contestants would likely raise Taipei's concerns about Beijing's willingness to employ similar methods to reclaim other "sovereign Chinese territory."

The Kalayaah portion of the Spratly Islands claimed by the Philippines is strategically important to Manila not as a staging area for power projection, but as a base for protecting and controlling the archipelagic waters and

sealanes of the Philippines and to provide a security zone to the west of Palawan Island. Because Malaysia and Brunei claim very limited portions of the Spratly archipelago, there is little strategic advantage provided by either claim. However, as major oil exporters dependent on access to the South China Sea SLOCs, both nations have a vital strategic interest in preventing one of the other Spratlys claimants from seizing control of the archipelago and possibly interfering with commercial shipping.

Economic Interests

In addition to their strategic value, the Spratly Islands offer the promise of significant economic gains from the exploitation of potentially rich hydrocarbon deposits. Estimates of South China Sea offshore oil reserves range from 2 to 15.8 billion barrels, and certain areas have been found rich in natural gas deposits, as well.³⁸ Surveys conducted since 1967 suggest that the seabed of the South China Sea may be one of the world's largest oil fields.³⁹ Successful oil exploitation has been underway for several years in the southwestern South China Sea, including the coastal waters off Borneo, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Malaysian peninsular. Exploration for new deposits continues to spread northeastward towards the disputed Paracel and Spratly archipelagos.⁴⁰

Although the ongoing dispute has so far prevented the completion of proper surveys in the Spratly Islands, the

archipelago's continental shelf could contain significant reserves of oil and natural gas, based on analyses of the area's geology.⁴¹ Both China and the Philippines have already been involved in offshore oil projects in the Spratly Islands, along with the foreign oil companies to whom they have granted concessions.⁴² According to the president of Crestone Energy Corporation, the 9700-square mile area of the Spratlys currently under exploration in an agreement with Beijing is estimated to contain one billion barrels of oil.⁴³

The potential for commercial development of oil and natural gas reserves in the Spratlys is an attractive lure for the competing claimants. China's economic growth has sparked an increase in oil consumption, up 8.5 percent in 1991 and 9 percent in 1992, while crude production has remained steady at 2.8 million barrels a day since 1989. In the absence of new reserves, China's oil production could fall 20 percent short of its requirements by 2000. Chinese oil exports have reportedly declined from 700,000 barrels a day in 1985 (27 percent of all exports) to only 200,000 in 1992 (5 percent all of exports), and some analysts predict that China will become a net importer of oil in this decade.⁴⁴ Beijing believes the Spratlys contain tens of billions of barrels of untapped oil reserves (a higher estimate than most) which could alleviate this shortfall.⁴⁵

Brunei and Malaysia both rely heavily upon oil exports as a source of revenue. Mark Valencia projects that Brunei, whose economy is almost entirely petroleum-dependent, will likely exhaust its oil and natural gas reserves by 2010 and 2007, respectively.⁴⁶ Although its Spratly Islands claim encompasses only Louisa Reef, a joint resource development venture could provide Brunei with expanded oil revenues into the next century. Oil exports are Kuala Lumpur's single largest source of foreign exchange; however, Malaysia is rapidly depleting its remaining reserves.⁴⁷ Development of offshore resources in the Spratlys, even under a cooperative development arrangement, would give the Malaysian economy a much-needed boost.

Vietnam has extensive proven oil reserves, estimated from 1 billion to 10 billion barrels. Hanoi has signed agreements with Royal Dutch/Shell and British Petroleum for oil exploration and development and has reportedly also negotiated a contract with one of Japan's largest oil companies.⁴⁸ Despite its significant indigenous petroleum reserves, Vietnam depended entirely upon the Soviet Union for its oil needs until it recently began pumping oil from its offshore fields.⁴⁹ Like Brunei and Malaysia, Vietnam would reap additional benefits from the development of potential Spratly Islands reserves.

Taiwan is situated amidst potentially rich offshore oil and natural gas deposits. However, Taipei's exploration and development of these reserves has been restrained by fears of Beijing's possible reaction to the discovery of a major field.⁵⁰ Taipei has expressed its support for joint development in the Spratlys, possibly because it views such cooperative efforts as a less risky means to decreasing Taiwanese dependence on foreign oil.

The Philippines stands to gain a great deal from oil development in the Spratlys. In addition to the Reed Bank oil venture, Manila granted a large concession in the waters off Palawan to a consortium of foreign and Philippine oil companies in 1973.⁵¹ Despite these efforts at offshore oil exploration in the Philippine archipelago, oil imports account for approximately 90 percent of Philippine energy consumption.⁵² The weak economy suffers from a severe balance of payments deficit, exacerbated by the loss of U.S. base rental payments and associated aid. Development of Spratly oil and natural gas reserves could reduce Manila's near total dependence on foreign oil and help stimulate Philippine economic development.

Regional Stability

While each of the claimants has its own national economic, territorial, and strategic interests in the Spratly Islands, all six share a common interest in maintaining a regional environment which fosters their

economic growth and security. However, the difficulty lies in achieving a solution to the Spratlys dispute in which none of the contestants perceives it is required to make unfair sacrifices in the name of regional stability. ASEAN, as a regional organization founded to promote social, cultural, and economic cooperation among its member nations, is also interested in promoting regional stability and the peaceful resolution of conflict, as demonstrated by its involvement in the Cambodian peace process. In the case of the Spratlys, ASEAN must balance the parochial interests of its three members who are directly involved in the dispute against its broader regional interests in stability and economic prosperity.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Capabilities to Influence the Spratly Islands Dispute

The primary means available to the six Spratly Islands contestants to influence the outcome of the dispute are diplomacy and military force--or some combination of the two. Clearly, the claimants do not all possess equal strengths and capabilities, particularly in the area of military power, and have developed their strategies accordingly. As a regional forum, ASEAN can employ its own diplomatic powers to mediate a peaceful settlement in the Spratlys; however, its efforts cannot succeed unless the claimant nations themselves are willing to engage in multilateral negotiations.

Military Capabilities

China has the strongest military in the region, and its ability to influence the Spratlys dispute through the use of armed force far exceeds that of any other contestant. The PLAN is steadily expanding its blue water capabilities, as evidenced by the introduction of a new generation of indigenous warships, including the Luh-class destroyer, Jiangwei-class frigate, and new logistics support ships (improving PLAN operational sustainability), as well as Beijing's reported plans to purchase an aircraft carrier.⁵³ Additionally, China's acquisition of long-range fighters and air-to-air refueling technology will extend the PLAAF's reach in the South China Sea, effectively countering the limited Vietnamese air threat to any future PLAN Spratly Islands operation.⁵⁴

A poor economy and the loss of Soviet military assistance prevent Vietnam from upgrading its own air and naval forces. Hanoi's remaining Petya II frigates and fast patrol craft reportedly are virtually non-operational, and a lack of spare parts has also reduced air force readiness.⁵⁵ Since its defeat in the March 1988 Sino-Vietnamese confrontation in the Spratlys, Vietnam's naval and air capabilities have further declined relative to those of China. Despite reported reinforcements of its Spratly Islands garrisons, Vietnam stands little chance against any further Chinese military action in the archipelago.⁵⁶

The three ASEAN claimants to the Spratlys have embarked on their own military modernization programs. Malaysia's defense purchases since 1988 include British Tornado and Hawk aircraft, new air defense radars, offshore patrol boats, and frigates. Brunei established its first air force fighter squadron in 1992 with 16 Hawk aircraft and is augmenting its maritime defenses with new patrol boats and maritime patrol aircraft.⁵⁷ The military buildups undertaken by both Malaysia and Brunei are geared towards defensive operations rather than power projection. Despite significantly improved capabilities to defend their respective EEZs and maritime claims, neither force could be expected to defeat a major attack in the Spratlys. Malaysia's Army Chief of Staff offers his assessment of the military situation in the Spratlys: "Even though we do not have the capability to go to war with China in view of its military strength and equipment, we'll try to defend our rights as far as we are able to."⁵⁸

In 1990 Manila announced ambitious plans to modernize its naval forces with new fast attack patrol craft, minesweepers, coast guard cutters, and search and rescue vessels. However, little progress has so far been made, largely due to the loss of U.S. security assistance funds which had been expected to accompany a renewal of the military bases agreement. Philippine defense officials reportedly are also considering the purchase Israeli KFIR or

Czech Albatross fighters, although economic ills may stall these plans, as well.⁵⁹ Philippine capabilities to defend its Spratlys claims are very limited; however, Manila might attempt to invoke its 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty with the U.S. if its forces there came under attack.

Taiwan maintains a strong and credible defense, as highlighted by the recent purchase of U.S. F-16 fighters. However, it is unlikely that Taiwan would be forced to defend Itu Aba, the single island of the Spratly group which it occupies. China poses the only real military threat in the Spratlys, i.e., none of the other claimants could be expected to initiate offensive military action, with the possible, though improbable, exception of Vietnam (and then only against the PLA-occupied islands). China and Taiwan view their positions on the Spratlys situation as mutually supportive and reportedly have even considered some form of cooperative exploration of the area's resources.⁶⁰ Beijing does not dispute Taipei's Spratly Islands claims or its occupation of Itu Aba and appears content to have Taiwanese forces enforce this portion of the "Chinese" claim to the archipelago.

Diplomacy

All six Spratly Islands contestants have expressed at least some interest in pursuing a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Beijing has been the most resistant to engaging in formal negotiations, while the militarily weaker

claimants view diplomacy as their most effective means of achieving a satisfactory settlement to the dispute. (Some have already held bilateral talks in an effort to reduce regional friction over the Spratlys.)

Indonesia, an ASEAN member with no claim of its own to the archipelago, hosted three informal workshops on the South China Sea and Spratly Islands dispute between 1990 and 1992. These conferences, attended by the "unofficial" representatives of the six governments involved in the dispute, have laid the foundation for more substantive negotiations. Building on Jakarta's efforts, ASEAN has called for discussions on the joint development of the Spratly Islands natural resources, while setting aside temporarily the more sensitive issue of sovereignty. Although the ASEAN July 1992 declaration was generally well-received, the prospective participants have yet to agree upon a framework for negotiations. Manila has proposed an international conference on the Spratlys conflict to be held under UN auspices.⁶¹ However, the other claimants generally favor a strictly regional forum, with either Indonesia or ASEAN as the likely mediator.

Malaysia and the Philippines argue that formal negotiations, the next logical step in the mediation process, are necessary if a settlement is to be reached.⁶² Hanoi also favors formal negotiations but is willing to engage in either formal or informal talks with the other

contestants, no doubt wary that failure to move beyond the status quo could invite further Chinese military action against Vietnamese holdings in the Spratlys. China, however, would rather proceed with additional informal discussions, similar to the three Indonesian-sponsored South China Sea workshops. As informal talks are not binding on the participants (who do not attend as the "official" representatives of their respective governments), this would suggest that Beijing is more interested in participating in the process than in achieving a diplomatic solution to the dispute.

Beijing also prefers bilateral negotiations to a single multilateral forum. As the major power in the region, China sees obvious advantage in dealing with the other Spratlys claimants on an individual basis. Beijing likely fears that in a multilateral forum the ASEAN claimants would present a united front--possibly in concert with Vietnam--in an effort to counter China's dominant position in the dispute.

Likely Courses of Action

All six claimants are likely to continue informal talks on the Spratly Islands situation which began in 1990. In accordance with the 1992 ASEAN declaration, discussions will focus on joint exploration and development of Spratly Islands resources, avoiding the highly contentious issue of sovereignty. However, the claimants appear a long way from

devising a workable negotiating process, let alone an actual agreement on joint development. Indonesia has offered its services as mediator in the Spratlys dispute and will push for formal negotiations, possibly under ASEAN auspices.

The three ASEAN claimants and Vietnam stand to benefit from an agreement for joint exploitation of the Spratly Islands resources. Until a settlement is reached, they risk Chinese intervention if they attempt to develop their own claim areas independently. However, China will probably hinder the negotiating process, making encouraging noises regarding regional cooperation while seeking to avoid substantive discussions. (Beijing's desires will also influence Taiwan, whose interests in the Spratlys are aligned with those of China.) Although reluctant to enter into formal negotiations, as one analyst observes, Beijing may see merit in voicing support for diplomatic initiatives in the Spratlys in order to defuse growing regional concerns over China's military buildup.⁶³

China will almost certainly maintain its current military posture in the South China Sea for the foreseeable future, even while engaging in further informal discussions on development of Spratly Islands resources. Recent Chinese actions (legislation formally incorporating the archipelago and authorizing the use of force to defend China's claim; the Crestone oil contract) are the most serious provocations by any of the claimants in the Spratlys dispute since the

1988 Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Beijing continues to send mixed signals regarding its intentions and could move to seize the archipelago by force, particularly if it sees little cost attached to such action.

Scenarios and Alternative U.S. Policy Options

The two scenarios examined here are considered the most likely based on the assessed interests, capabilities, and limitations of the relevant actors. The first, Scenario A, is the continuation of discussions towards peaceful resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute, progressing from informal talks to more formal negotiations on joint exploration and development of natural resources. Scenario B is the use of military force by China to consolidate its claims over the entire Spratly archipelago. Chinese military action is considered here as the potential "worst case" scenario in terms of U.S. interests and objectives.

A range of U.S. policy options (courses of action) are proposed and evaluated for each of the two scenarios. The desired endstate is the preservation/restoration of regional stability and security and the maintenance of unrestricted access to strategic SLOCs. In each case, the current U.S. policy, i.e., no official position on the Spratly Islands dispute or the competing claims is presented as Policy Option 1. From the foregoing analysis of U.S. interests and elements of power and those of the other relevant actors, two additional policy options have been

developed for each scenario. These options, which are distinguished primarily by the elements of power employed to achieve U.S. objectives, should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. They can be implemented either separately or in combination (concurrently or sequentially), the latter approach providing greater flexibility in shaping the final endstate.

Scenario A: Continuing Negotiations towards Resolving the Spratly Islands Dispute

Policy Option 1: No Direct U.S. Involvement

The U.S. will continue its official "hands-off" policy towards the Spratly Islands dispute. Specifically, the U.S. will:

1. not endorse or favor the claim of any nation or nations;
2. not directly criticize the actions of any of the contestants in the dispute;
3. reiterate U.S. support for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the South China Sea, as in other regions of the world.

Policy Option 2: Increased Use of Diplomatic and Economic Power

The U.S. will actively encourage a peaceful resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute through the application of diplomatic and economic power. Specifically, the U.S. will:

1. support continued multilateral discussions on the Spratly Islands;
2. encourage the creation of a formal negotiating process under UN or ASEAN auspices;
3. formally endorse the ASEAN South China Sea Declaration on joint development of Spratlys resources;
4. reiterate U.S. strategic interests in maintaining unrestricted access to the South China Sea SLOCs and U.S. concerns over military conflict in the region;
5. denounce unilateral action by any of the claimants as destabilizing;
6. take a tougher diplomatic stand against Chinese provocations, such as the February 1992 legislation incorporating the Spratly Islands and authorizing the use of force to enforce Chinese sovereignty;
7. offer technical and economic support to joint development projects agreed to in multilateral discussions;
8. discourage U.S. companies from participating in commercial activities in the disputed areas;
9. assist U.S. companies in procuring contracts for future joint exploration and development ventures in lieu of commercial agreements with individual claimants.

Policy Option 3: Increased Use of Diplomatic, Economic, and Military Power

The U.S. will actively encourage a peaceful resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute and deter further

military conflict among the claimants through the application of diplomatic, economic, and military power. This policy incorporates the elements of Policy Option 2; in addition, the U.S. will:

1. reemphasize the U.S. commitment to continued regional security engagement;
2. maintain a forward presence in the region through military access agreements and routine U.S. naval operations in the western Pacific and South China Sea;
3. increase U.S. participation in bilateral military exercises in the region;
4. emphasize U.S. regional defense ties and shared security interests with the ASEAN member nations.

Scenario B: Chinese Military Action in the Spratlys
Policy Option 1: No U.S. Involvement

The U.S. will maintain its neutrality in the Spratly Islands dispute in the event of a military conflict between China and other claimants. Specifically, the U.S. will:

1. call for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and a cessation of hostilities;
2. not formally denounce Chinese military action or single China out for criticism;
3. not apply economic sanctions against China;
4. not provide military assistance to other claimants whose Spratly Islands holdings come under attack.

Policy Option 2: Use of Diplomatic and Economic Power
against China

The U.S. will apply diplomatic and economic power to pressure China to cease military action in the Spratlys and resume negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute. Specifically, the U.S. will:

1. convey disapproval of Chinese actions via diplomatic channels and warn of stronger measures if China does not withdraw forces;
2. if China does not withdraw, formally denounce Chinese actions and encourage other nations to take similar measures;
3. introduce a UN resolution condemning Chinese use of military force (although Beijing can exercise veto in Security Council);
4. offer to conduct shuttle diplomacy and participate in mediation process;
5. impose economic sanctions and/or a trade embargo against China;
6. encourage China's trading partners, including Japan and the EC to impose economic sanctions.

Policy Option 3: U.S. Military Intervention in the Spratly Islands

The U.S. will intervene militarily to force China to cease military operations against the portions of the Spratly archipelago occupied by other claimants. Specifically, the U.S. will:

1. declare intentions to protect access to strategic SLOCs and to preserve regional balance of power;
2. provide military assistance to ASEAN nations defending their Spratly Islands holdings;
3. immediately increase U.S. military presence in region, placing a carrier battle group on station in the South China Sea;
4. conduct military operations in coalition with ASEAN forces as a show of force against Chinese action.

Evaluation of U.S. Policy Options

Scenario A

Policy Option 1 gives the U.S. virtually no influence in determining the outcome of the Spratly Islands dispute and greatly limits opportunities to achieve an endstate supportive of U.S. interests and objectives in the region. This policy fails to promote the negotiating process which, in the absence of international support, could easily collapse before reaching a settlement. Furthermore, it offers no incentive to China, the major power in the region and a reluctant participant in the negotiations, to actively pursue a diplomatic resolution of the dispute.

The lack of progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict is in itself destabilizing because of continued tensions over competing claims in the archipelago, exacerbated by a regional arms buildup. Additionally, the

policy does not deter military adventurism in the South China Sea, particularly by China, who sees little risk in pursuing its own military option in the Spratlys. As the U.S. recently learned in the Persian Gulf, the perceived abrogation of U.S. interests in a regional dispute can invite military aggression by the stronger state.

Because the U.S. does not apply any of the elements of national power to influence the Spratly Islands dispute, the direct costs of implementing this policy are negligible. However, the long term costs are somewhat higher, as U.S. interests in regional security and stability and the peaceful resolution of conflict are placed at risk.

Policy Option 2 has greater potential to achieve the desired endstate. It establishes the U.S. as an interested party and clearly and unequivocally defines U.S. interests and objectives in the outcome of the Spratlys dispute. This policy promotes further discussions among the claimants and progress towards a settlement through formal negotiations. The U.S. is not directly involved in the mediation process, although the door is open for an increased U.S. role at some later date. This option enables the U.S. to exert pressure on China to participate in meaningful negotiations and also provides additional incentives for all claimants to reach an agreement by offering U.S. technical and economic assistance for joint development of the archipelago's natural resources.

By imposing legal restrictions or economic disincentives to limit commercial activities by U.S. companies in disputed areas, the U.S. eliminates perceptions of government involvement in these private business ventures or official endorsement of one of the competing claims. This also minimizes the potential for American citizens or property to come under attack in a military conflict between claimants, a significant problem in its own right.

This policy diverts U.S. diplomatic leverage on China from other issues in order to create the desired endstate in the Spratlys. However, the cost may well be outweighed by the benefits accrued in promoting a peaceful resolution of the Spratly Islands conflict, an endstate which supports U.S. longterm strategic and regional interests.

Policy Option 3 also clearly establishes the U.S. as an interested party and effectively promotes U.S. interests and objectives in the Spratly Islands conflict. As in Policy Option 2, diplomatic and economic power is used to promote multilateral negotiations and create incentives for reaching a peaceful settlement. In addition, the U.S. reemphasizes its commitment to regional security and counters any perception of a regional power vacuum in order to deter military adventurism. This course of action presents a multilateral front to those states who might threaten regional stability, while providing a tangible

demonstration of continued U.S. security engagement in the region. It also increases the associated risks for any Spratlys contestant contemplating the unilateral use of armed force in the archipelago.

Although most effective in supporting U.S. interests and objectives, Policy Option 3 is also the most costly. As the U.S. reduces its defense establishment, fewer forces are available to support diverse global interests and commitments. Assets must be diverted from other areas in order to conduct naval operations and bilateral exercises in the South China Sea. (Although this option does not call for a significant increase in U.S. forces beyond those already required to maintain a routine forward presence in the region.) As in Policy Option 2, this course of action will affect other aspects of an already complex Sino-American relationship, possibly reducing U.S. influence on other issues of concern.

Policy Option 1 does not adequately promote U.S. interests in the region. A policy of total neutrality provides no impetus to a peaceful settlement of the ongoing Spratlys dispute and does not actively support regional stability and security. Policy Options 2 and 3 are significantly more likely to achieve an endstate consistent with U.S. interests in the region. The latter will probably be more effective in promoting U.S. long term interests in a regional balance of power by specifically deterring military

adventurism. However, it is more costly to implement and more difficult to sustain any policy which requires the use of military forces, even as a deterrent.

Scenario B

Policy Option 1 provides no effective deterrent to Chinese military action in the Spratlys. The likely endstate is total control of the Spratlys by China, thus extending Chinese power projection in the South China Sea and creating a potential threat to critical SLOCs. U.S. failure to act in this scenario also undermines U.S. credibility in the region, calling into question the extent of Washington's commitment to regional security and possibly prompting the ASEAN states to reconsider the value of U.S. military access agreements. Loss of assured access to these regional facilities would significantly degrade U.S. military operations in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans. Though ineffective in countering Chinese aggression this course of action avoids a Sino-American confrontation, minimizing the impact of the Spratlys issue on other aspects of Washington's China policy.

Policy Option 2 makes military action in the Spratly Islands a costlier option for China. Diplomatic and economic sanctions (preferably imposed in coalition rather than unilaterally) increase pressure on Beijing to cease its military aggression, forcing China to reassess the potential costs and benefits of seizing the archipelago by force.

Meanwhile, U.S. shuttle diplomacy maintains open communications with China and the other actors, possibly facilitating a facesaving compromise for Beijing. This policy also minimizes U.S. risks in penalizing China for its aggression by avoiding direct U.S. military involvement in the conflict. The primary cost of imposing sanctions to alter Chinese behavior is the associated impact on other aspects of Sino-American relations.

Policy Option 3 is the most effective in directly countering Chinese military action in the Spratlys. This course of action supports U.S. interests in maintaining regional security by deterring/defeating Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and reassuring other nations of a continued U.S. security commitment. The U.S. could either conduct unilateral military operations against Chinese forces or act within a regional coalition. Establishment of a coalition would present a politically united front against Chinese aggression and also avoid the appearance of U.S. "imperialism" in the region. However, it would take considerably longer to assemble a multilateral coalition than to deploy U.S. naval forces sufficient to deal unilaterally with the PLAN threat.

With sufficient warning of Chinese intentions, the U.S. may be able to intercede to convince China to back down and abandon its military plans in the archipelago. However, Beijing's reaction to a U.S. show of force in the South

China Sea will depend largely on Chinese perceptions of U.S. willingness to intervene militarily, i.e., the credibility of the U.S. threat. Even in a limited naval engagement between the U.S. Seventh Fleet and inferior PLAN forces, national will and domestic consensus remain important considerations in U.S. crisis action planning.

The suitability of Policy Option 2 depends to a large extent on how quickly China acts to seize the Spratly Islands. If sufficient time is available before any actual fighting occurs, diplomatic and economic sanctions may be sufficient to achieve a withdrawal of Chinese forces. However, once China has successfully defeated other forces and seized their territory in the Spratlys, it will be more difficult to convince China to relinquish its new holdings. In such an event, military intervention, as outlined in Option 3, would probably be required to restore the status quo in the Spratlys and the regional balance of power.

Conclusions

The current U.S. policy towards the Spratly Islands dispute does not adequately promote U.S. interests and objectives in the region. U.S. interests in regional stability and security and unrestricted access to strategic SLOCs are best supported by avoiding conflict in the region. Yet the current "hands off" policy in the Spratlys is not designed to achieve this endstate. It provides no impetus to the negotiating process necessary to achieve a peaceful

resolution of the conflict and no disincentives to unilateral military action by China. A more active role by the U.S., employing the elements of national power in an integrated strategy to make negotiated settlement more attractive to all claimants, could help avert a regional military confrontation in the Spratlys at a relatively low cost (diplomatically, economically and militarily).

Should China launch a military attack in the Spratlys, the policy options available to the U.S. will carry greater costs and risks, in terms of resources expended and the potential effects on other regional and strategic interests. In attempting to manage this crisis, the U.S. will have to evaluate the long term impact on relations with ASEAN, the credibility of U.S. regional security engagement, Sino-American relations, regional stability, and strategic access. (This list of considerations is by no means exhaustive.)

The situation could be further complicated by the normalization of U.S. relations with Vietnam, the most likely target of any future Chinese aggression in the Spratly Islands. Hanoi presently lacks a military benefactor and might request U.S. assistance in defending against a Chinese attack. However, even if Washington considered military action to defeat Chinese forces in the Spratlys necessary to preserve regional stability and

security, the perception of U.S. intervention on behalf of Vietnam would make this option less acceptable.

The U.S. requires a well-defined policy towards the Spratly Islands which recognizes the impact of the dispute on regional stability and security and which promotes an endstate consistent with U.S. interests and objectives. This policy must be integrated into a comprehensive U.S. regional strategy and must be implemented before the Spratlys dispute escalates into a military conflict, creating an even more difficult problem for U.S. policymakers.

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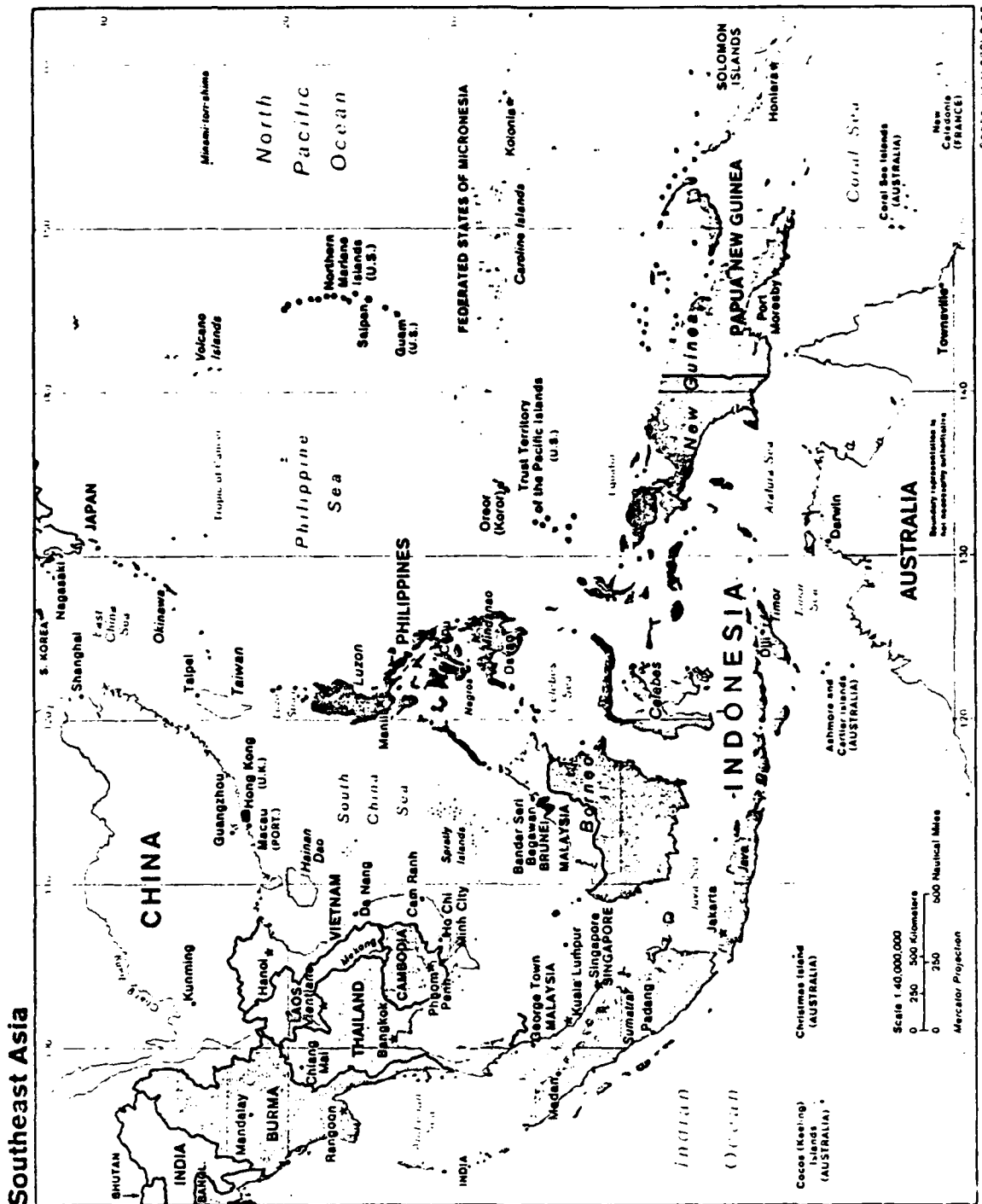
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Figure 1

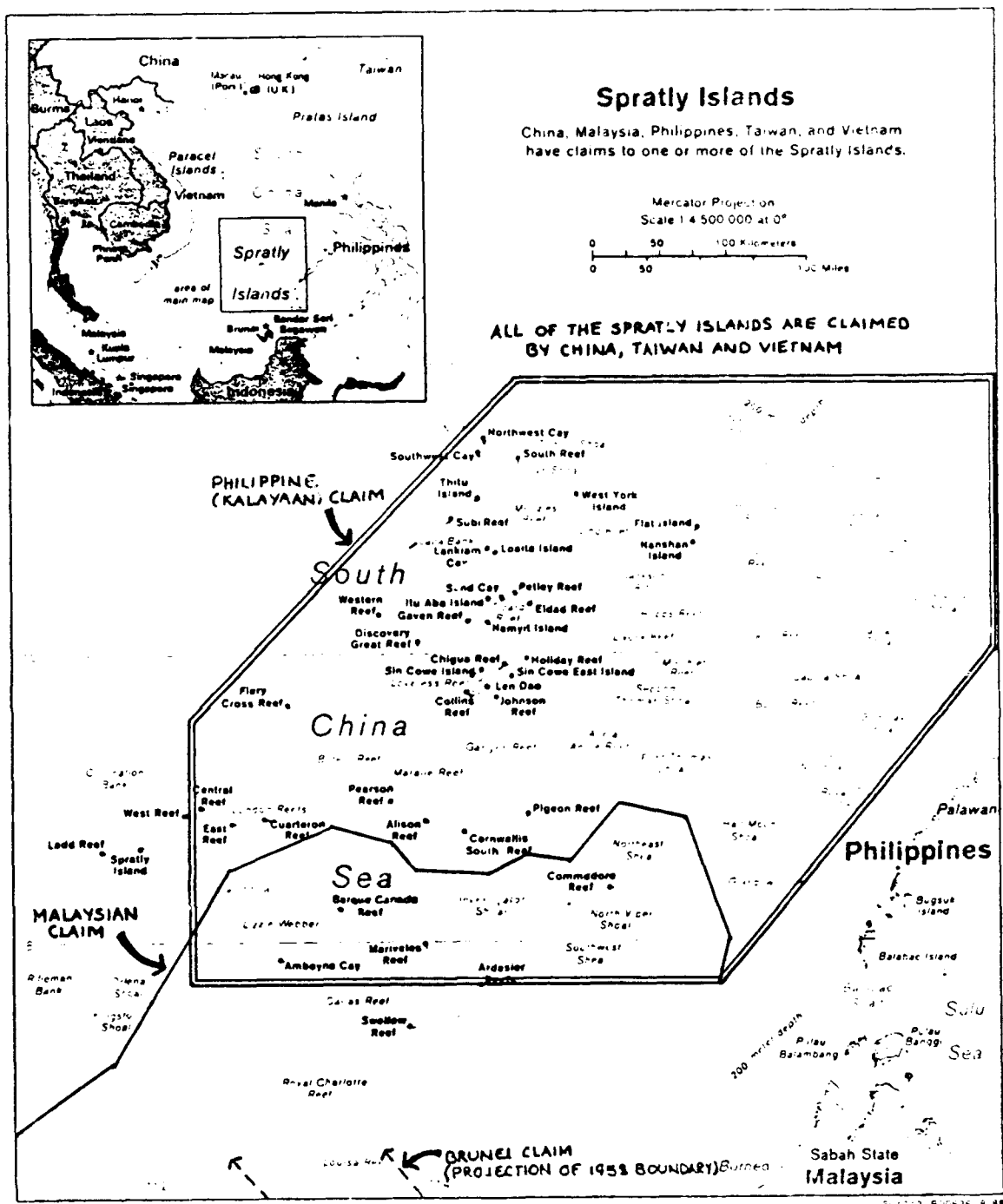


Figure 2

JOINT AND COMBINED ENVIRONMENTS

Lesson 10. Strategic Analysis

Appendix 1 to Advance Sheet, Lesson 10. A Guide To Conducting Strategic Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

"[S]trategic level of war--(DOD) The level of war at which a nation or group of nations determines national or alliance security objectives and develops and uses national resources to accomplish those objectives. Activities at this level establish national and alliance military objectives; sequence initiatives; define limits and assess risks for the use of military and other instruments of power; develop global or theater war plans to achieve those objectives; and provide armed forces and other capabilities in accordance with the strategic plan. [JCS Pub 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (1 Dec 89), page 349]

Strategy seeks to organize and synchronize the application of national power in pursuit of national goals. It is characterized by a broad scope: horizontally (across various instruments of power and regions of the world) and vertically (through time). Because of its scope and complexity, strategy places special intellectual demands on the planner. Strategic thinking requires creativity: the strategist must seek new ideas and approaches constantly. Strategic thinking also demands rigorous and logical methods for integrating a wide array of factors.

Why should the mid-career military officer be concerned with strategic thinking and analysis? While a great deal of debate occurs on this subject, very simply, since the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 amended the National Security Act of 1947, the United States, as a matter of policy, has challenged the military--

a. To improve military advice provided the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.

b. To increase attention to strategy formulation and contingency planning. [JCS PUB 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces, p. 21]

Military advice and strategy are based on sound strategic analysis. Good analysis does not guarantee good advice, but without good analysis all advice must be suspect. Specifically, JCS Pub 0-2 holds the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsible for strategy formulation and military advice. In fact, page 1-10 in JCS Pub 0-2 states:

Subject to the direction, authority, and control of the President and the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman will:

(1) Prepare military strategy and assessments of the associated risks. These will include the following:

(a) A military strategy to support national objectives within policy and resource level guidance provided by the Secretary of Defense. Such strategy will include broad military options prepared by the Chairman with the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CINCs.

(b) Net assessments to determine the capabilities of the armed forces of the United States and its allies as compared to those of potential adversaries.

The preceding function, seemingly obvious and simple, is the foundation for subsequent action at each subordinate level. The effectiveness of all actions depends on the judgment of the decisionmakers referenced above.

Joint and Service staff officers, whether in intelligence, operations, plans or logistics, will invariably participate in developing strategic policy and military advice. The planner must be aware of the strategic environment and must be able to articulate not only the elements of the national security and military strategies but also the elements and inputs that are crucial in developing those strategies. Strategic analysis is the general term for this process.

Staffs that typically engage in strategic analysis are those associated with the National Security Council, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the unified and specified commands. Those staffs are responsible for addressing all elements of power when producing estimates and recommendations. Therefore, planning at the strategic level, and the closely associated operational level generally begins with the disciplined process of strategic analysis.

The methodology for strategic analysis shown on page ii illustrates an approach to this staff function that organizes information and judgments in a coherent fashion. The model is useful for (a, generating options in a crisis situation at the strategic level and (b) performing long-range strategic analyses of geographic regions or portions thereof.

All institutions, organizations, and bureaucracies have analytic approaches to the body of knowledge within their purview. Most military officers who have served on staffs have worked with methods similar to the one described below. This guide is based on the cumulative experience, applications, and suggestions of DJCO instructors and CGSOC students. Because this methodology is a malleable tool, not a dogmatic, doctrinally approved template, users can tailor it to their personal and organizational analysis styles and requirements.

Each of the five steps in the methodology has at least one judgment criterion. All criteria are only recommendations. An analyst may omit some or may add others. The key is to conduct reasonable and measurable evaluations at each step in the process. The quality of results will invariably reflect the attention given the evaluations.

CLARIFY TASKING AND GUIDANCE

- STEP 1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM & ESSENTIAL ASSUMPTIONS
- STEP 2. IDENTIFY US INTERESTS & ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER
- STEP 3. IDENTIFY OTHER RELEVANT ACTORS; THEIR INTERESTS, ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER; AND THEIR LIKELY COURSES OF ACTION
- STEP 4. DETERMINE FEASIBLE SCENARIO'S & DEVELOP AND TEST OPTIONS
- STEP 5. DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS & CAVEATS

PRESENT ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS IN REQUIRED FORMAT

Figure 1. Strategic Analysis Methodology

2. STRATEGIC ANALYSIS: TASKING AND GUIDANCE

In many instances higher authorities provide the problem and assumptions. More often than not, however, higher authorities request the staff to provide an objective statement of the problem. Before strategic analysis begins, the planner should seek maximum clarification of the problem and assumptions from higher authorities. Then the planner should search for the most authoritative policy or doctrine that relates to the issue.

Sometimes the executive or congressional position exists in official records or in departmental documents such as the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan. At other times the strategist must rely on more abstract sources such as legal precedents, written policy papers, or political speeches, e.g., Nixon's Guam Doctrine, Carter's Doctrine, or Bush's Aspen speech. Sometimes the intent is explicit, but usually it is implied.

Collecting information is critical to quality analysis. The value of strategic recommendations depends heavily on the depth and breadth of information the analyst brings to bear on the problem. The more quickly a strategist masters the use of sources, whether in a library or in intelligence data bases or contacts with regional experts or with responsible agencies or elsewhere, the better.

3. STEP 1: STATE THE PROBLEM AND ESSENTIAL ASSUMPTIONS

Take the word "problem" literally. A problem is not a tasking. The problem is not: "Report on the situation in Central America for the J5." That may be the analyst's problem, but it is not the nation's. One test for identifying a problem is to identify the US interests involved and the threat or threats to those interests.

JUDGMENTS TO IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

Is a US interest involved?

Does a threat to a US interest exist?

For example: Saying that "insurgency X is threatening to overthrow country Y" is not an adequate problem statement because it does not indicate why the United States is concerned. An adequate problem statement would be: "Communist-led insurgency X is threatening to overthrow country Y, which is friendly to the United States and is a country in which the United States has economic and strategic interests."

In using the strategic analysis methodology in a crisis situation, the analyst may focus on a limited number of interests and threats. For long-term regional assessments, the number of interests and threats will be larger. In fact, the sources of regional conflict will more accurately represent the threat. These should be viewed within the context of regional forces and trends.

The analyst must remember that situations will generally include both immediate and long-term problems. The second set of judgments requires that both the immediate and long-term factors be identified and their relationships clarified. The analyst must ask how the United States wants a given part of the world to look in 5, 10, or 20 years. "Strategic vision" requires solving an immediate problem in a way that contributes to either the solution of a long-term problem or the attainment, promotion, or protection of long-term US national interests.

JUDGMENTS TO IDENTIFY LINKED PROBLEMS

What is the immediate problem or objective?

What is the long-term problem or objective?

How do these problems relate to each other?

Identifying assumptions is one of the most problematic steps in strategic analysis. Assumptions obviously qualify and dilute the value of the analysis and recommendations. Thus, as a general rule, the fewer the number of assumptions, the more solid the analysis and recommendations. On the other hand, some analysis will be meaningless without an initial position on certain "givens." For example, unless the planner can assume "no nuclear exchange" the subsequent analysis could result in dramatically different recommendations.

JUDGMENTS TO IDENTIFY ESSENTIAL ASSUMPTIONS

Is assumption vital for completing the analysis?

Is assumption necessary to distinguish between multiple settings or circumstances?

Can assumption be proved or disproved?*

*If an assumption can be proved or disproved then it is not an assumption: It is a fact.

Also, strategic analysis requires continuous feedback loops. This means that after completing the first run-through, the strategist reevaluates assumptions

and possibly rejects some or adds others. It may be necessary to build one or more sets of scenarios, options, and recommendations if the assumptions underlying your analysis are critical.

4. STEP 2: IDENTIFY US INTERESTS AND ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

Step 2 is an elaboration of US interests and elements of national power.

JUDGMENTS TO DETERMINE INTERESTS

What are the relevant US interests?

How should the interests be rank-ordered?

Do conflicts or contradictions exist among the interests?

The major sources of US interests are--

a. National Security Strategy of the United States.

b. Defense Planning Guidance.

c. SECDEF's Annual Report to Congress.

d. National Security Decision Directives.

e. Executive Orders.

f. Speeches and statements by government officials, e.g., State Department policy papers. The State Department Dispatch is an excellent source.

After the analyst identifies US interests, he must use them to construct some notion of the desired end-state. The key is to craft a fairly comprehensive picture of what the US would want a region, a country, or the world as a whole to look like in the future. This will assist in framing the development of strategic options. In some cases the strategist may identify interests not listed in the preceding sources; however, that will be rare.

At this point the analyst should identify the policies, programs, and commitments that reflect and support US interests. The sources listed above can also assist with this task. However, the analyst must be careful. Often the policies, programs, and commitments are constructed in vague and ambiguous manners to provide "diplomatic maneuver space."

The elements of national power serve as the base for identifying a nation's ability or means to affect change or impose its will in a given situation or region. Understanding and being able to evaluate national power is a vital element of strategic analysis. JCS Pub 0-1, Basic National Defense Doctrine, provides excellent descriptions of national power:

a. "The elements of a nation's power comprise both sources and instruments of power, which are interrelated. The power or influence a nation can bring to bear in the world is derived from its own national

strength and, in alliances, the strength of other nations with which it shares common interests. National strength is derived from an aggregate of geographic extent, configuration, and position; population size and characteristics; raw material and agricultural potential; industrial productivity and flexibility; transportation and communications infrastructure; overall economic strength and vitality; national character and shared beliefs; knowledge of worldwide events, actions, and trends which affect the national interest, e.g., intelligence; national will and domestic support of government policy; and the effectiveness of national direction. These sources of national power are not directly employable, but they serve as the potential for mobilizing specific instruments of national power, which are employable. The primary sources of power conducive to security in an uncertain world are favorable geography, an industrious and creative population, a strong and flexible economy, skillful national direction, and unified national will. The first is a gift of nature; the remainder must be developed....

b. From these sources are derived the instruments of national power, which are generally described as economic, e.g., economic aid, trade agreements and sanctions, technology transfer; diplomatic, e.g., communication, negotiation, alliance, arms control; informational, e.g., international information programs, ideological proselytizing; and military, e.g., use of force or the threat of use, non-hostile military action. These instruments are complementary, and nations employ them in varying combinations as components within their overall national security strategy. As their employment is intertwined, the distinctions among them are often blurred." (emphasis added) [JCS PUB 0-1, pp. I-4 to I-5]

A strategist must be aware that the advantages and disadvantages of each instrument of national power are inherent, complex, and, to some extent, situation-dependent. Inherent advantages and disadvantages for each instrument of power are shown in figure 2.

ELEMENT	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Economic	- Only moderately expensive to use	- Slow to affect behavior of target - Can cost user as much as the target - Effective only if target is vulnerable
Diplomatic	- Very cheap to use - Few adverse side-effects	- Ineffective against a determined target
Informational	- Very cheap to use - Difficult for target to block or counter	- Difficult to determine the effectiveness - Difficult to control
Military	Usually the most effective and quickest way to affect target	- High "cost" - Contingent on national will

5. STEP 3: IDENTIFY OTHER RELEVANT ACTORS, THEIR INTERESTS, AND THEIR ELEMENTS OF POWER

The test for a relevant actor is relatively simple. Actors include states and nonstate entities. In some cases all identified actors may be incorporated into the analysis. But to separate essential actors from secondary actors, the strategist must further distinguish according to the actor's capability and willingness to act.

JUDGMENTS FOR A RELEVANT ACTOR

What is the actor's degree of interest in the outcome?

Does actor have the power to influence the outcome?

Will actor use power to influence the outcome?

Now, as with the US, identify the interests, objectives, policies, programs, commitments, and sources and instruments of national power for the relevant actors. This inevitably calls for judgments on the part of the analyst based on the best and most current data available, and is typically the realm of the intelligence and foreign area specialists.

6. STEP 4: DEVELOP AND TEST OPTIONS BASED ON FEASIBLE SCENARIO(S)

Discerning appropriate courses of action is the most difficult task in strategic analysis. In fact, it is the heart of the entire process; and by comparison all else seems almost mechanical. At the operational level, when concrete force strength and weapon systems data is available, it can take the form of war-gaming. But at the strategic level this step is much more abstract. The operational technique of testing each enemy capability (attack, defend, delay, etc.) in turn against the friendly capabilities is a useful analogy and will reveal the basic options.

This step, more than any other, requires the strategist to attempt to think like others. That, in turn, requires an understanding of their culture, values, history, and the like. Obviously, the deeper the understanding, the better. In real-world strategic analysis, learning to understand others is another appropriate juncture to consult regional experts.

An assessment of the feasible outcomes in the absence of US action will also frame the analysis here. This is derived from the interests, objectives, and resources of other relevant actors. This assessment describes scenarios based not only on capabilities, but also on intentions. Once the most likely scenarios are ascertained, the strategist should develop a range of options for each scenario. Each option should consist of an objective or a desired end-state, elements of power to be used in attaining that objective or end-state, and a plan describing the phased application of the instruments of national power. The number of feasible scenarios analyzed is dependent on time available, the situation, the quantity and quality of information available, and the skill and imagination of the analyst. It may be possible or necessary to develop options only on the single most likely scenario.

Selecting the appropriate instruments of power is crucial. After a strategist clarifies objectives and assesses the sources and instruments of national power that are appropriate to the situation, there is always a temptation to simply advocate using the most readily available instrument. However, that could have undesirable side effects. Thus the strategist should ask the five questions below before recommending the use of a particular instrument of national power.

First, what will the long-term effects be? Clearly the use of a power resource is intended to affect the behavior of a particular target individual, group, or nation. But the impact on unintended targets (individuals, groups, and nations) not involved in the specific conflict are just as important. The strategist must consider the effect that the use of a specific instrument will have on perceptions of domestic audiences and the world community. A large nation's use of military power against a small nation may have serious effects on the large nation's image. Thus in special situations the long-term costs of using military power may outweigh the short-term benefits.

Second, how quickly must the behavior of the target individual, group, or nation be affected? If the behavior of the target must be affected quickly, military power may be more useful than any other. If time is not of the essence, the political costs of military power, which tend to be high, may lead the strategist to consider diplomatic, informational and economic power.

Third, can the application of a given power resource be sustained? The strategist must consider how long this nation can apply an instrument of power and whether the target's behavior is likely to change within that time period. This is a vitally important consideration for the United States, which tends to experience rapid fluctuations in national will, impatience, and a slow to build, quick to lose national consensus toward the use of not only military power, but the other instruments as well. This question is especially important when the United States is dealing with insurgencies, nondemocratic states with strong ideologies, or firmly entrenched leaders that have the will and the ability to be more patient.

Fourth, what mix of instruments should be used? In a given situation, the strategist must consider that certain power resources are complementary and some are conflicting. The target's behavior can be affected by positive inducements (which reward desired behavior) and negative inducements (which punish undesired behavior). The strategist must be wary of simultaneously mixing negative and positive inducements, because doing so may confuse the target. During the Angolan Civil War, the United States demonstrated mixed actions. The United States promised Angola diplomatic recognition if Cuban troops withdrew. Simultaneously, the United States was supporting a guerrilla movement that was attempting to overthrow the Angolan government.

The planner should be especially cautious when recommending the use of military power. While they do not constitute official policy or doctrine, the six criteria for the use of military power developed by former Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger have become useful considerations. They are:

- "US forces should only be committed to combat in defense of interests vital to our nation or our allies.

- US forces should only be committed in numbers adequate to complete the mission.
- US forces should only be committed when we have clearly defined political and military objectives.
- The relationship between objectives and forces committed should be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary.
- US forces should be committed only when there is reasonable assurance of support from the American people and Congress.
- US forces should only be committed as a last resort."

NOTE: For an explanation of the "Weinberger Doctrine," see Alan Ned Sabrosky and Robert L. Sloane, eds., The Recourse to War: An Appraisal of the Weinberger Doctrine (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1988).

Fifth, how should the application of the instruments of national power be phased? Just as a military campaign entails phasing, branches, and sequels, so also should strategic advice. The strategist should note that if instrument X does not bring results within a certain period of time, greater reliance should be placed on instrument Y.

While all strategists must understand the integrated use of all elements of power in pursuit of national interests, the military strategist should be particularly sensitive to the role of military power in an integrated national strategy. This holds both for strategic options for dealing with a crisis and a long-term regional strategy.

Once a range of options is developed, define each one in terms of the following questions:

Given the advantage and disadvantage of each instrument, what mix of power resources is to be applied?

How are the instruments to be applied (negatively or positively; unilaterally or multilaterally; and so forth)?

When are the instruments to be applied (phasing)?

After a comprehensive list of options has been developed, rank order the list. This begins the most judgmental part of the process.

JUDGMENT OF OPTIONS ("FAS" TEST)

FEASIBILITY: Are mobilized and usable instruments (resources) adequate to execute the option?

ACCEPTABILITY: Will the national will support the option?

SUITABILITY: Will the option attain, promote, or protect the identified US interest(s)?

More than likely several options will pass this test. A more precise device must be used to evaluate each one. The last judgments assesses five aspects of each option in terms of cost, benefit, and risk, and helps to quantify the analysis of the relative merits.

COST, BENEFIT, AND RISK IN TERMS OF--

Instrument(s) of national power to be used?

National interest of highest priority relevant to the option in this particular case?

Other national interests?

Long-term interests or objectives?

Interests and objectives outside given region?

7. STEP 5: DEVELOP RECOMMENDATION AND CAVEATS

The recommendation is the option that is:

- Based on the most likely scenario, and
- Scored highest in the cost-benefit-risk analysis.

Circumstances may require the analyst to caveat the recommendation. A caveat, by definition, is a warning. Caveats emphasize that the recommendation is conditional and susceptible to change.

A caveat indicates in precise form a factor or an action on which the recommendation is contingent. Thus, the reader knows on what basis he/she may have to transition to an alternative plan or option.

Often caveats are derived from assumptions and emphasize the criticality of the assumptions. Either explicitly or implicitly, the planner says, "My conclusions are valid only if my assumptions hold." If events change and assumptions can be proven accurate or inaccurate, further analysis is required. Other caveats deal with timing ("This option is recommended only prior to a United Nations' resolution"), or form ("This option is not recommended unless Allies participation can be kept secret").

8. CRISIS VERSUS LONG-TERM PLANNING

As noted earlier, strategic analysis can be used for both crisis planning and more general, long-term strategic planning. Each requires a slight adaptation of the model.

<u>CRISIS VERSUS LONG-TERM PLANNING</u>	
CRISIS	LONG-TERM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Situation itself usually helps indicate the priority of interests and threats.- Options are usually mutually exclusive. An option may call for the use of only one or two instruments (e.g. diplomatic only or diplomatic and economic only.- Desired end-state is usually clear and straight-forward.- Threat usually indicates the focus of effort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Careful analysis is required to prioritize interests and threats.- Nearly every option includes all instruments of national power in some form. Analyst decides how far and how fast to escalate toward direct use of military power.- Desired end-state more amorphous. Requires strategic vision- Analyst must organize the region. This requires performing "strategic triage" to indicate problems that deserve priority attention

The range of options developed during strategic analysis is clearly situation-dependent. It is, however, possible to describe general patterns for crisis and non-crisis planning.

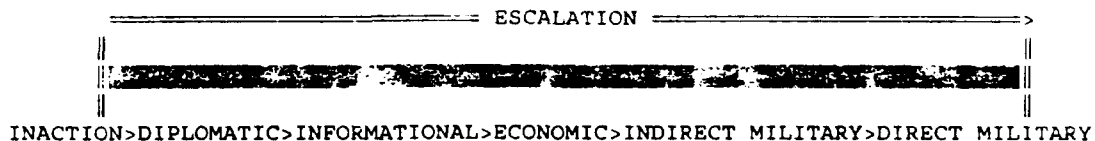
In crisis planning, the instrument of national power used will often distinguish options. A range of options might include:

- OPTION 1: Do nothing
- OPTION 2: Use diplomatic and informational power only.
- OPTION 3: Use diplomatic, informational and economic power only.
- OPTION 4: Use diplomatic, informational, economic, and indirect military power.
- OPTION 5: Use all instruments of national power, including direct military power.

Once a strategist decides among these generic options, he/she must specify:

- How, when, and where each particular instrument is to be applied.
- Risk.
- Expected reactions by other parties involved in the crisis.

A range of options for long-term planning would be similar. Again, a spectrum where the instruments of national power are organized according to increasing cost and risk is useful:



Given this template, the strategist must decide how much escalation is warranted given acceptability, suitability, feasibility, and costs/benefits/risks. When is escalation warranted?.

9. OUTPUTS.

Strategic Analysis is a process and not a product. Strategic analysis may be used at the national, JCS, service, or major command level as a basis for many different products: update briefings, discussion papers for the commanders and staff principals, or concept/COA development in deliberate or crisis planning. There is no one single manual for this process or for appropriate formats. The individual CINC's and Commanders exercise considerable latitude in how they want strategic analysis done and what formats to use within their areas of responsibility. Joint doctrine and procedures continue to refine this process and generate suggested formats.

(1) JCS PUB 0-1, Basic National Defense Doctrine (Draft), December 1991, contains an appendix titled "Estimate of the National Military Strategic Situation." This format requires: (1) an analysis of the national objectives, including an overview of the fundamental problem and an estimate of the friendly and enemy situation; and, (2) a discussion of national military strategic issues, including a strategic concept, strategic direction, concept for force buildup, intelligence and logistics concepts, and a discussion of the military's role and the aftermath.

(2) JCS PUB 3-0, Doctrine for Unified and Joint Operations (Test) January 1990, contains a guide for a strategic assessment. Appendix B, "The Strategic Estimate," contains a 5-section format that can be used as a base document for Appendix C, "Campaign Plan Format." Appendix B includes: (1) Strategic Direction, which assesses global and regional components of National Security and Military Strategies; (2) the Theater Strategic Situation; (3) Strategic Concepts, which assess military, diplomatic, economic, and socio-psychological dimensions; (4) Specific Courses of Action, and, (5) a Decision section, which outlines recommendations for courses of action.

(3) AFSC PUB 1, The Joint Staff Officer's Guide 1991, includes a short chapter, "Staff Work: Method and Applications," which addresses general written and oral requirements and formats found in the joint arena. (Chapter 3, pages 3-1 thru 3-13).

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